

“Successful” Prayer

Series: Understanding Prayer

Acts 12:1-17; John 21:17-22 (1009)

Steve Wood

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1 Timothy 6:6-9 *Godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.*

JUDY GARLAND *If I'm such a legend, then why am I so lonely? . . . Let me tell you, legends are all very well if you've got somebody around who loves you.*

Philippians 3:14 ¹⁴*I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Matthew 20:25-27 NLT ²⁵*But Jesus called them together and said, “You know that in this world kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people beneath them. ²⁶But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wants to be first must become your slave.*

CHARLES KINGSLEY *The men I have seen succeed have always been cheerful and hopeful, who went about their business with a smile on their faces, and took the changes and chance of this mortal life like men. . . . If you wish to be miserable, you must think about yourself; about what you want, what you like, what respect people ought to pay you, what people think of you, and then to you nothing will be pure. You will spoil everything you touch; you will make sin and misery out of everything God sends you; you can be as wretched as you choose.*

I. Realities only biblical understanding can address

a. When faithful Christians seem to be treated so differently by God

Acts 12:1-11 ¹*It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. ²He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. ³When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. ⁴After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. ⁵So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. ⁶The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. ⁷Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists. ⁸Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him. ⁹Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. ¹¹Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating.”*

b. We are not the first ones to struggle making sense of it all

Acts 12:12-17 ¹²When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. ¹³Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. ¹⁴When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!" ¹⁵"You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel." ¹⁶But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. ¹⁷Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the brothers about this," he said, and then he left for another place.

OSWALD CHAMBERS Sum up the life of Jesus Christ by any other standard than God's, and it is an anticlimax of failure. We are not called to be successful in accordance with ordinary standards, but in accordance with a corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying, becoming in that way what it never could be if it were to abide alone.

II. Measuring success in prayer God's way

a. Life-changing good news

Mark 16:7 ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.

b. Prayer ultimately has only one goal—to glorify God!

John 21:17-19a Jesus said, ... ¹⁸*I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.* ¹⁹Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.

c. Prayer ultimately has only one command—Follow me!

John 21:19b Then [Jesus] said to [Peter], "*Follow me!*"

d. Prayer ultimately has only one qualifier—If I want _____, what is that to you!

John 21:20-22 ²⁰Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. ... ²¹When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" ²²Jesus answered, "*If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.*"

William Barclay The point is that Jesus has the right to choose who will be martyred and who will survive. (Or whose prayer is answered / whose is not, etc)

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER The figure of the Crucified invalidates all thought which takes success for its standard.