

# *The Mystery of Prayer*

BY RICHARD JORDAN

How clearly I can still hear those words from the lips of that dear lady! I was attending a YMCA convention in my home town. We had been assigned to groups of ten, with an advisor for each. One evening as we discussed the subject of prayer, our instructor burst into a heartbroken sob and told us not to get our hopes up too high because, “*it just doesn’t work like the verse says it does.*”

The verse was Matt. 21:22:

“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.”

What a *heartbreak* to see this dear woman—and there are thousands like her—crushed under the weight of claiming God’s Word by faith and then having it fail! But what a *joy* to be able to whisper into her ear the answer—that while Matt. 21:22 is indeed God’s Word, it was *not* God’s Word to her.

The vast majority of believers today have great inner fears about their prayers. They hear the exciting testimonies of “successful” prayer warriors who give illustration after illustration of personal triumphs in prayer. They hear—and they *fear*. For when *they* apply the offered “success formula” it only confirms what their heart feared all along—“*it won’t work for me.*” Confusion and bitterness are often the result.

The basic fallacy in modern-day prayer preaching and prayer practice comes from the failure to rightly divide the Word of Truth—the claiming of prayer promises that have nothing to do with the dispensation in which we live, but belong rather to a program which God Himself has interrupted and is temporarily holding in abeyance.

The answer to the seeming mystery of prayer is the mystery revealed through the Apostle Paul. Indeed, no one can say that prayer is a simple matter if they fail to recognize the distinctive ministry and message committed to Paul.

The prophetic program called for the blessings of God to go to the Gentiles through Israel, Abraham’s seed (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:17,18, etc.). When our Lord appeared He took up the theme of the prophets, proclaiming to Israel, “*Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matt 4:17), and going “about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and *preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing<sup>1</sup> all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people*” (Matt. 4:23; cf. 9:35, etc.). All this because, as Rom. 15:8 says,

“Jesus Christ was a minister of the Circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.”

The Twelve Apostles were trained and sent out to preach this same message (Matt. 10:1-8). After the resurrection their ministry was enlarged (Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47, Acts 1:8), but not

---

<sup>1</sup> A clear foretaste of the blessings of the Kingdom. See Isa. 35; 33:24, Jer. 30:17, etc.

changed. Still the blessings were to go to the nations through Israel, Abraham's seed. Thus Peter declares to them;

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;”

“And He shall send Jesus Christ, who before was preached unto you:”

“Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.”

“Unto you first God, having raised up His son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:19, 20, 25, 26).

It is not until after the stoning of Stephen that the record gives any indication of a change in the established program. And how things do begin to change with the salvation of Saul of Tarsus! Our ascended Lord not only reached down and saved His chief enemy, but also made him His chosen vessel to carry a hitherto hidden message of grace to a rebellious world. Salvation—not through Israel's *rise* to Kingdom glory, but rather in spite of her rebellion, indeed, through her *fall*—was now to be sent to all alike (Rom. 11:11, 30-32).

The prophetic program has been set aside for a time and the *unprophesied* “dispensation of the grace of God” has replaced it. Today the Kingdom program is held in abeyance—temporarily suspended—while God is forming the Body of Christ. With this change in program, Israel and her program are set aside, replaced by the mystery committed to us through the ministry of Paul (Eph. 3:1-9).

Our ascended Lord gave to Paul—and through him to us—the very secret of His will, the “eternal purpose” kept secret from before the foundation of the world! As I Cor. 2:7 declares,

“...we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory.”

What a glorious calling believers have today! What a shame to fail to appreciate it by failing to recognize and practice our standing in grace! Nowhere is this made clearer than where the subject of prayer is concerned.

How a recognition of the mystery affects our prayer lives—and that for the good! Rather than trying to force the Kingdom promise in Matt. 21:22 to work today, how much better it is to practice *Rom. 8:26-28*,

“...for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”

“And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

Instead of wondering why John 14:13,14 does not “work” in our situation today, how much more blessed to apply *Phil. 4:6,7*!

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”

“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Instead of developing “theological gimmicks” as excuses when Mark 11:22-24 does not work for us, how much more reassuring to rest in *Eph. 3:20-21!*

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,”

“Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

These verses really fit today. *They are God’s Word to us—so they work for us today!*