

Value In Prayer?

Not long ago it was reported that a brother said, "It doesn't do any good today to pray." His idea was that the only benefit that comes through prayer would be that those for whom we pray might be comforted in knowing someone was thinking of them. Apparently, to him, because the age of miracles is past, the power in prayer has also passed. Such a position places man in a most precarious position. If God doesn't hear prayers today, then praying for forgiveness would be a wasted effort.

Our brother confuses the providential working of God with His miraculous works. The two are not the same. The age of miracles IS past. Does that mean that God has abandoned our world and that He occupies the position of a nonparticipating spectator? By no means. God's providential hand still moves and He still is interested in man. He still makes provisions for His children, just as He has promised He would.

We cannot always say with certainty "I know God answered my prayer." Prayer is in the realm of providence and we do not see God at work nor can we know why some things have happened the way they have. We must be as Paul, who considering the events in the lives of Onesimus and Philemon, said, "For perhaps he was for this reason parted from you for awhile that you should have him back forever" (Philemon 15). Perhaps. There WERE some things in Onesimus' life that God was not responsible for. He was not responsible that Onesimus fled from his master. Still, God could have moved in that situation to bring Onesimus into contact with Paul which led the way to his conversion and to righting the wrong he had committed against Philemon.

Joseph's brothers meant nothing but evil against him, but God's providence overruled their intent and brought about good. Joseph said: "Ye meant it to me for evil, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20). In Esther's day the fate of all Jews seemed to be death. Did God cause that Esther should be chosen as queen? Perhaps. Was, on the other hand, God responsible for the drunkenness of the king who asked Queen Vasti to parade herself to the lustful gaze of those others drunken with him? Certainly not. Did God use this to bring about safety for His people? Perhaps. Esther's cousin asked, "Who knows that thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).

Some miracles were worked through prayer: Jesus' feeding the multitude; Elijah's petition for fire as well as many others. But prayer, itself, is not in

the realm of the miraculous. So, we ask for wisdom, our daily bread, strength, forgiveness. We plead for the sick, we pray that honest hearts may receive the word, that God may be glorified in us. Are we praying that miracles happen? No. But we do not know God's mind nor His working in human affairs through the natural means. We know He can, and so we ask, as He teaches us, praying in faith that we may be heard.

Does it do any good to pray? For the faithful child of God, it does. Jesus said that "Men ought always to pray and not to faint." Paul wrote: "Pray without ceasing." Sometimes prayer is the ONLY thing we can do so let us be constant in it.

Jim McDonald