

Praying For A Miracle

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“Why do you believe that God exists and answers your prayers when He obviously does not answer the prayers of somebody who has lost a limb in a car accident? Does God hate amputees?”

The argument is that all of the things we claim are answered prayers are actually coincidences that cannot be scientifically correlated to God’s intervention. In fact, it has been noted that prayer has almost no effect on the outcome of any health- or money-related quandaries. “One of the most scientifically rigorous studies yet... found that the prayers of a distant congregation did not reduce the major complications or death rate in patients hospitalized for heart treatments... A review of 17 past studies of ‘distant healing,’ published in 2003 by a British researcher, found no significant effect for prayer or other healing methods” (“A Prayer For Health”, www.boston.com/news/globe). So the question remains: If we claim that God heals cancer, helps us find a job, and keeps our kids safe, then why does He totally and completely ignore the request of amputees to have their legs regenerated? The person asking these questions might note the following verses:

- *“If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer”* (Matthew 21:21).
- *“If you ask anything in my name, I will do it”* (John 14:14).
- *“Ask, and it will be given you”* (Matthew 7:7).
- *“Nothing will be impossible to you”* (Matthew 17:20).
- *“Believe that you have received it, and it will be yours”* (Mark 11:24).

One of the first things we have to establish in any discussion with a person asking these questions is the context of the verses he or she is using. When Jesus spoke such things to His disciples, He did not literally mean that everything they asked for would come true like a genie in a bottle. For example, the sons of Zebedee ask to bring fire down on Jesus’ detractors and this was not allowed (Luke 9:54). So because Jesus does not give people the ability to bring down heavenly flames – no matter how intently they may pray for it – does this somehow mean He does not exist? Jesus makes it clear that the disciples would suffer for the name of Christ (Matthew 10) with no promise of relief. The disciples did not have the power to cast out certain demons, no matter how hard they tried. Even some of Jesus’ own prayers did not turn out as He desired. He prayed in the garden that the cup of the cross would pass, and it did not. He prayed for unity in John 17:20-21, and this is not the case today. So obviously, Jesus cannot literally mean these statements, because in His own lifetime there were instances where the answer to certain requests was clearly “no”. So what does He mean, then? How can a loving God promise answered prayers and then not answer the simple prayer of an amputee?

Miracles Or Just Providence?

One of the most glaring problems with using some of the above verses to argue that Jesus promises fulfillment to all prayers is that those verses are not speaking to us directly. These were promises made in an age of miracles, when signs and wonders were meant to confirm new revelation from God. Consider:

- *“After [the Gospel] was first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (Hebrews 2:3-4).*
- *“And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by signs that followed” (Mark 16:20).*
- *“Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands” (Acts 14:3).*
- *“The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles” (2 Corinthians 12:12).*

A truth becomes plain from the above verses: Jesus' first disciples were not given miraculous powers to alleviate all human suffering, in general, but to confirm their message by miraculous evidence. It has never been God's goal to remove all forms of suffering in this world – that will only come in the next life (Revelation 21:4). When the revelatory age ended, the divinely prescribed time for miracles also ended. When God was done talking to the world through the apostles (who alone could pass on miraculous abilities [Acts 8:14-19]), the miracles were also done.