

## **GOD ANSWERS WORDLESS PRAYERS**

Isaiah 41: 17-18 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Beloved, our gracious God is a God who hears and answers the prayers of His own people, the Bride of Christ. Jesus said in John 14: 14, “If you ask anything in My Name, I will do it.” John adds in I John 5: 14, 15, “And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.” In the Old Testament in II Chronicles 7: 14, we read, “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” Beloved, it’s not the length of our prayers or the beauty of them or the brevity of them that matters. What matters most is if we are open to the will of God in our lives and in the lives of those we are praying for. It’s easy to pray for our will to be done. It’s far more difficult to have the courage to say what was once prayed at a meeting of the FCA some years ago, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. At that meeting, Bobby Richardson, former New York Yankee second baseman, offered a classic prayer in brevity and poignancy: “Dear God, “Your will, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Amen.” Would you ever have the courage to pray, what Bobby Richardson prayed, “Dear God, “Your will, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Amen?”

Sometimes God comes through for us as He came through for me a week ago this past Wednesday, April 20th, just before Jinny and I headed out to Salt Lake City to pick up Retired Colonel Tim Baer and Pastor Shavez Williams. JoAnn placed on my desk a letter from Oklahoma City, from a lady whom I counseled many years ago, and I tried to help her, and we tried to help her daughter for quite a while. This lady I have thought about a few times, over the years, but probably not at all in the last few years. As I looked at the letter and who it was from, I could hardly believe this woman was writing me. She was a lady deep into drugs, alcohol, and she was living, far, far, from God. And for what purpose was she writing? When this family moved away from Rock Springs, I never dreamed I would hear from Carol again. (Carol is the name I am giving her—to protect her identity. She didn’t appear to have followed my counsel at the time, and yet, we seldom know the last word as to whether our counseling, mentoring, or discipling has paid off in most people’s lives. But here was this letter addressed to our church at 125 Firestone Road with my name on it. Here are a few of her words:

“I hope this card finds y’all healthy, wealthy, and wise. I have learned to define recovery as my daily walk with God and God gives me good, orderly direction. I want to thank you for being so patient (7 hours and lots of blood, sweat, and tears) to put my feet back on solid ground. I still practice sign language. Brother Gene, my friend, that you often witnessed to, went to be with the Lord. You came, you remember to my duplex and witnessed to him, and Jesus rescued him. (By the way, I never knew Gene ever really came to faith in Jesus.) Carol wrote, “Gene was faithful to God’s Word.” My son is a homeless veteran, and my daughter has four daughters and lives in Houston. My stroke in 2010 initially left me unable to read, write, or speak, and I could use your continued faithful prayers. Recovery takes

time. Even small steps will get you where you're going. I've found I am never alone on the journey. Thank y'all! Bless y'all! Love y'all! Trust and obey! Take care. See you in Heaven. April 16, 2022." I cried! As I cried, I realized God was answering a prayer I had long since quit praying and probably would never again have thought to pray for Carol. Now she is back on my prayer list. But why in the world would Carol write me, and why would God allow her letter to arrive on my desk only a couple hours before taking off for Jerome, Idaho for the IWD-EFFC 11th Annual Conference at Magic Valley EFC?

Sometimes, beloved, as we all are human, when I think of God's work in the IWD-EFFC, I am tempted to be discouraged. I have never in my whole life, seen any work of God more under fire on a daily basis than the Intermountain West District. After a number of families had to leave our conference early, JoAnn said to me, in Jerome, as she has seen the spiritual warfare up close and personal, she said, "Pastor, remember, it's the IWD!" The devil hates what's going on in our District and what went on at our conference for the Glory of Jesus. That day when I read the card, I was thinking about some significant people who wanted to come to our conference, but called and said they couldn't come because of health issues, I wasn't even praying about the IWD at the moment, but when I read the letter, I heard God's whisper in my heart, "Your work is not in vain in the Lord." And after weeping, my heart sang, as I said to God, "Thanks, Lord, for an answer to prayer, a prayer I never even prayed.

This week, God led me amazingly to this little passage tucked way back in the Old Testament Gospel of Isaiah. Isaiah the prophet's book is so full of passages about Jesus coming, and this prophetic book, written around 712 BC, is often referred to as the Gospel of Jesus in the Old Testament. The text today I am preaching from is found in Isaiah 41:17-18. What got my attention this week was the phrase in verse 17 that reads, "I, the Lord, will answer them." The NASB rightly translates the phrase, "I, the Lord, will answer them Myself." So, I went back to look at the question of God's people that He was answering. What amazed me most was that there was no question that was prayed to the Lord. All that happened is that I read, "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the Lord will answer them Myself. I, the God of Israel will not forsake them." Certainly, the prayers in their hearts were for water, but Isaiah never records that they prayed. All they did was seek water while dying of thirst. Sometimes we have such heavy burdens and such great needs that we walk around seeking for answers, but we don't even ask God. Sometimes we can't even find words to express our deepest hearts before the throne of God. We don't know how to pray. Paul knew about such moments, for he wrote interesting words in Romans 8: 25, 26. "But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." In our text today, the Lord assures us as His people, that He hears more than our prayers. He even reaches deeper into our lives. He hears and answers our needs before we even ask. He answers our needs according to His riches in glory

by Christ Jesus. To God, there is a cry to Him in a moan or a groan or a tear or even in our despair. He answers our wordless prayers.

In our text today, there are five divine responses to consider, in this answer to the wordless-prayers of God's people. As we search the Scripture today, let's go on a treasure hunt to find these five responses, these five clues that help us come to understand why God even answers our wordless prayers: All five of these clues or responses in our text, reveal increasingly more and more about our Lord. First,

**OUR GOD SEES WHEN OUR SITUATION IS DEEP POVERTY.** (I.) The first few words in Isaiah 41: 17 are "The poor and needy..." Who is God speaking about? The word for afflicted or poor is **aniy**. **Aniy** in the Hebrew means to be depressed in mind or circumstances, to be looking down in a brow-beaten state, to be afflicted by harsh treatment, abused either physically, sexually, or in sore travail. Genesis 16: 6 uses **aniy** to speak of Sarai's handmaid whom she foolishly gave to Abram so she could have children by her handmaid. We read, "So Sarai treated Hagar harshly, **aniy** and Hagar fled from her presence. Turn to Genesis 16: 7-11. Are you **aniy** today? I tell you—I promise you. Our God sees.

The second word is needy. This Hebrew word is **ebyown**. **Ebyown** means destitute in feelings physically or spiritually a beggar. Day after day at work, I talk with folk that are unemployed, and destitute in feelings. As I was working on this part of the message, a native American came to pour out his heart. He wasn't after money. He came seeking Jesus and this man is now my brother. His father, a Baptist preacher died from Covid-19 during the pandemic. Michael is now our brother in Jesus. When we are needy, that's the place to start." As Michael left, I watched him walking back to the motel where he lives as he is an ironworker who works every day. Paul speaks of people that are **ebyown** spiritually in Ephesians 2: 12. He takes us back to a time before we were saved. He writes, "Remember that you were at that time, without Christ, separate from Him, aliens, separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenant promises of God, having no hope, and without God in the world."

The only sinners that God can help are what the Puritans like John Gill called "sensible sinners." These sensible sinners, by the grace of God, have become aware of their lost and ruined condition before God. When the prodigal son came to himself, when he came to his senses, he was a sensible sinner. The publican who prayed, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," was also a sensible sinner. The Pharisee who prayed thanking God that he was not a great sinner like this publican was just as great a sinner as the publican, but he was not a sensible sinner. He didn't know it. A spiritual beggar in sin, who is poor and needy is without merit before God. He knows he has no righteousness, and he is destitute for an atonement for him. He is without strength and is helpless and hopeless before God. It's like the old Gospel song, "Come ye sinners, lost and hopeless, Jesus' blood can set you free. For He saved the worst among you, when He saved a wretch like me. And I know, I surely know, yes, I know, I surely know, Jesus' blood can make the vilest sinner clean." Repeat. Beloved, those who are afflicted, poor, and needy

need not despair any longer. You will never go away from the Door of mercy or the Throne of grace empty. Our God sees the harsh treatment we face, and He sees our deep poverty. Secondly,

**OUR GOD KNOWS ABOUT OUR URGENT NEED.** (II.) I read in verse 17, “When the poor and needy seek water and there is none.” Beloved, water is an urgent necessity because it is always an immediate necessity. The afflicted, the poor and the needy seek from God an immediate necessity—water, and we all need it and need to seek it now. This is more than a traveler seeking money for a bus ticket or food to eat or a night’s lodging. The thing these destitute seekers were looking for was water. Water is supposed to be free. It is a must, vital to live. Spiritual thirst is when we are destitute for what only can be found in the Word of God, and we can’t find the Word. Amos speaks of such a need and such a time of need in Amos 8: 11, 12. He writes, “Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord God, When I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the Lord. And people will stagger from sea to sea, and from north even to the east; they will go to and fro, to seek the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.”

Jesus knows when we need the water of His cleansing blood, the very water of life. David wrote in Psalm 51: 7, “Purify/Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Sometimes, just like Kansas winter wheat is crying for rain, or Iowa corn or Nebraska alfalfa, or they way we have been praying as a church for moisture, God knows about our urgent need, and He has been answering. Thirdly,

**OUR GOD DISCERNS OUR DISAPPOINTED HOPE.** (III.) Look, “The afflicted/poor and needy are seeking water, but there is none...” These people of God in the Old Testament knew where to go for water. They knew where it should be found, and where others had found water before, but there was none—deep disappointment. To come thirsty to a well that used to have water, and today, the well is dry. What a picture! Have any of us had disappointed hope with God? I know what it is to know where the answer is to be found, but I have gone there, haven’t you, and come back empty. Every believer who has lived very long in the Christian life has had dry times. We have sought for cool, clear water spiritually, for the answer God tells us is coming, only to find it is still missing. We’ve been to the Word of God, to the throne of grace. We’ve been to the house of God and worshipped. We have obeyed the promptings of the Lord, as best we can, and still, our cups are dry.

Sometimes, like David, we cry out, as in Psalm 42: 7 that our circumstances are drowning us. David cried, “Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls; All Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me” Or we have cried as David cried in Psalm 88: 14, “O Lord, why do You reject my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me? When God says, “I, the Lord will answer them Myself, it is because He knows, and He discerns the hope deferred that has made our hearts sick; He knows about our disappointed hopes. Fourthly,

### **OUR GOD SOMETIMES LETS US GET BONE DRY IN OUR PAIN. (IV.)** I

read in verse 17. “The poor/afflicted and needy are seeking water, but there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, or failing for thirst.” The Hebrew word for failing or parched is **nawshath**. This Old Testament word is only used 9 times and it means to dry up or to eliminate or to fail. God lets us get so desperate for Him at times. For believers, we can cry out for communion with God and sense He is far off, we can beg for a word of wisdom from the Lord and sense the heavens are brass. We can seek for a prompting of the Spirit to be fulfilled, and it seems fruitless to seek any longer. For lost sinners, God allows sinners to become desperate for grace, desperate for pardon from Him, and desperate to be accepted in the beloved, as they have heard it spoken. We sing about these bone-dry times. “And I, I’m desperate for You, and I, I’m lost without you.” Sometimes God allows our need to become so great, so great a thirst for Him that words cannot express our souls. But I hear His voice saying, “I the Lord will answer them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them. Finally, fifthly, when we think all is gone and God doesn’t care,

### **OUR GOD THEN POURS OUT HIS ABUNDANT GRACE IN SPRINGS AND RIVERS AND FOUNTAINS AND POOLS OF WATER. (V.)** Notice

verse 17b and 18. “I, the Lord, will answer them Myself, I, the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.” God somehow wants us to seek His face, to call on Him, not to forget He is our only Source. Moses tells us in Deuteronomy 32: 36, “For the Lord will vindicate His people, and will have compassion on His servants; When He sees that their strength is gone, and there is none remaining bond or free.” Notice the verbs—I will answer. I will not forsake. I will open. I will make. The picture that comes to my mind is the picture of the Jews that we have seen over and over since they won the 1967 war. What a terrible dilemma they so often in as even our own leaders in America have called for them to give back their own God-given land to the Palestinians. Zechariah 12: 10 speaks of a desperate day soon coming “when all the Jews will look upon the One whom they have pierced.” Then in the desperation of their mourning, I read in Zechariah 12: 10, “I will pour out on the house of David and Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication and 13: 1, “In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David for sin and for uncleanness.”

Sometimes God allows us to find how full of grace He is in the valley of conviction or the valley of adversity or in the valley where we are dying of thirst. Just remember, beloved, that if you are in a time of affliction, despair, thirst, or desperation, God is just around the corner, and He knows how much we can bear. He is testing our metal. Like a coach, He is bringing us to a stronger place to stand. His call for one more lap is ultimately for our good. The rivers of God’s grace are about to open, the floodgates of His covenantal promises are about to pour out, and the living water from the Lord Jesus is about to fill us to overflowing. Let’s pray!