

## **1 KINGS 3:4-15** **AN OPEN INVITATION**

Jesus said, "Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith." (Matthew 21:22). At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." (1 Kings 3:5). That's quite the open invitation from God to us. Did you get what you asked for for Christmas? Maybe not, maybe you asked the wrong person, and you didn't ask God in faith. Even when we do ask God, often we don't get what we asked for. This asking theme is found throughout the Bible, and Christians have struggled with it. What can it mean if we don't get what we asked for?

For starters it's a test of faith. What will you ask for: long life, riches, life of your enemies? It's usually one of those three that we do ask for. We ask for a long healthy life, not one with pain and suffering. We look for the cross of glory, and not the cross of suffering. The glory is Jesus coming down from the cross before He dies and proving to people that He's the Son of God. The suffering is Jesus dying on the cross to pay for our sins.

We think suffering is good for Jesus, but not for us. We mostly want the glory – riches to bring us an easy life where we don't have to work for anything, but it's all handed to us without cost. The cost of eternal life was placed on Jesus, and now we want the easy life, even a Christianity without any effort – no studying of God's Word, no serving the church in any way, just come in when we feel like it, sit down, hear what you want to hear, and leave. 'Don't ask anything of me, and if you do, then you've annoyed me and become my enemy.'

Most of us have enemies: in the church, in our families, in the community. Oh, we wouldn't ask for the life of our enemies, that's one thing we can proudly say we'd never ask for. But maybe, secretly, deep in our heart, we do. We may have thoughts that they'll get into an accident and we'll never have to see them or deal with them again. Or maybe we tone down our thoughts to financial crisis, divorce, or something else that will just make them move away. That's what we ask for from God, not reconciliation, but rather that our enemies just go away somehow.

No, that's not what God is offering you. God is offering you an open invitation to come to God like children and ask for anything in faith and in keeping with God's commandments. God delights in us asking for anything, but we shouldn't expect that God will always work according to our desires. Even if we do ask in faith and according to God's ways, God may have different plans for us. The key here is to ask, and to leave how God responds up to God.

Another time that God made this offer was to another king, king Ahaz. "The Lord spoke to Ahaz, "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as

Sheol or high as heaven." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:10-14).

Ahaz was right in saying, "I will not put the Lord to the test." Jesus Himself said that to Satan citing from Deuteronomy 6:16, "'Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.''" (Matthew 4:7). But here God had invited Ahaz to ask for a sign, and so it wasn't a test. God wanted to confirm what He had spoken to Ahaz and move Ahaz to believe, but Ahaz responded in false piety trying to hide his unbelief. Ahaz didn't ask in unbelief, he didn't ask at all, and so God gave him what he didn't ask for. This is a practice of God as He said to Isaiah, "I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, "Here am I, here am I," to a nation that was not called by My name." (65:1).

Solomon didn't ask for the goodness of God in long life, riches, or the life of his enemies, but God gave it to him anyways. Ahaz refused to ask for the sign that God offered, and God still gave it to him. Sometimes we think that God isn't acting in our lives, or bringing us good things because we've not prayed, or prayed faithfully enough, and sometimes that can be true if we're praying with unbelief in our hearts, and other times God is answering us in ways we didn't think to pray for, or want to pray.

Do you trust God enough to want to pray to Him? I'm not asking if you pray in faith, but rather let's just start with if you want to pray. Often we can want to pray, but don't, not because of unbelief like Ahaz, but rather because we feel unworthy like Solomon, or we feel we don't know what to pray for. We can wonder if we should pray for something, it might not be the right thing to ask God for, and so He won't answer us, or He might get angry with our childish prayers and give us something bad. And so we don't pray. We can feel like Solomon not knowing how to discern between good and evil.

Those are the times when it's good to listen to the instructions of Jesus. Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:7-11). The key here is that God will answer with goodness. Maybe you won't get the bread or fish that you asked for, but He won't give you something like a lump of coal in your stocking.

What's being asked of us here and in all those places where these kinds of texts appear is that we ask in faith. Can we ask according to God's ways and trust that He'll answer us with His goodness? That's not always an easy thing to do, and so it might help you to listen to Jesus as He struggled with His own asking of God.

The night of Jesus' arrest Jesus "fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." ... Again, for the second time, He went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, Your will be done."" (Matthew 26:39, 42).

What might help you to get up the courage to accept God's open invitation to pray to Him and ask of God what He shall give you may be to repeatedly hear how God wishes to bless us.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians in our Epistle reading, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight" (1:3-8).

Does that help you to take courage and ask of God in prayer and faith? If you're in the position of Ahaz, changing to the position of Solomon in your prayers may not be easy. Such a person needs to frequently hear that God is for them, and not against them (Romans 8:31-32).

James said that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." (1:17). Only good gifts are going to come to you from the Lord our God, and that's not going to change.

John wrote: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." ... "And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us." (1 John 4:9-10, 5:14). This is the God whom you pray to and ask things of. He's the One who hears you, loves you, and has good gifts for you, the greatest of which is His Son Christ Jesus who took away all your sins through His death so that you might live through His resurrection. He's the one whom the virgin gave birth to and called His name Immanuel – God with us. Amen.