



## **“Will God Hear?”**

**Kevin Presley**

I hope you and your loved ones have remained well in these uncertain and turbulent times. Today is a day when many are thinking about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and that's a good thing because Jesus DID arise from the dead and it changed everything. The world and our eternal future was changed. It brought hope where there was no hope. It secured the promise of tomorrow where there was no promise of tomorrow, the hope of eternal life. We today can know the resurrection from deadness of sin, as well as the physical resurrection from the dead when Jesus comes again. All because Jesus came out of that tomb on the first day of the week, long ago.

But we don't merely celebrate that on one day of the year. We do so every Lord's Day. Sunday is the Lord's Day and His people come together to commune, and in so doing, we not only proclaim the Lord's death, but we also celebrate His resurrection and look forward to His coming again. I am thankful that Jesus died for my sins and I'm thankful that He rose again securing the hope of eternal life. If you don't know that hope, if you have not experienced the power of His resurrection through obedience to the gospel, I want to urge you to be thinking about that and to do something about that today. We certainly continue to pray for all those affected by COVID-19 and all who are facing the fallout of what this has done to the world economically and in many other ways. Our prayers are with our leaders who are tasked with leading the nations of the earth and the governments within them through this turbulent period, the healthcare workers and those who must work to keep our society functioning. Our prayers are with all through this time. May God give you the wisdom and strength to do the right things for all involved.

Speaking of prayer, that's a popular subject right now. I've read articles in the past week or two that pointed out that people have been turning to their faith during this time of trouble. We're being encouraged, and rightly so, to seek God's help through this crisis. Burdened with fear and anxiety along with the fact that the pace of our daily lives has been slowed to a near halt, many have been turning their minds to spiritual matters such as reading the Bible, spending time in prayer, and evaluating their relationship to God. We're constantly told by religious leaders and even political leaders to pray. Just a

few weeks ago, President Trump designated Sunday, March 15<sup>th</sup> as a day of prayer, urging Americans to turn to God and to pray for our nation and the world in the midst of this crisis. I always appreciate any world leader who will acknowledge a power greater than themselves and one who will encourage people to seek God.

The question is, will God hear when we cry out to Him? Can we take for granted that God is listening and will respond to our prayer? We know that the Bible teaches that God hears and answers prayer, and He has certainly commanded His people to pray. He has offered us the comfort and consolation, the opportunity and privilege of prayer. But does that mean when crisis and calamity come, and people cry to the Lord for help that they can merely assume that He WILL hear and answer? We can see throughout history where people have called upon God in times of distress and sometimes He listened and other times He did not. As we look at those times recorded in scripture, there is a common theme that runs throughout. Sometimes God said He would hear and then there were times when He refused His people. So, what was the difference?

Let's begin our study by reading from the book of **Psalms**. This is one of David's psalms of praise extolling the greatness and power of God.

**Psalm 145:17-20 "The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them. The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy."**

One of the great comforts of life is knowing that God is ultimately in control of the universe and He is a hiding place and a refuge when distressing things happen that we have no power over ourselves. Since we live in a fallen world, we all must deal with the scars that sin has left upon God's creation. Because this earth has been corrupted and polluted by sin, terrible things sometimes happen to us or around us, and we're often left to wonder why.

Last week, we looked at what the Bible teaches is the source of difficulties such as diseases, famines, and natural disasters. For example, many are claiming that COVID-19 is a plague sent from God to punish the world for its sinfulness. If you missed that program, I hope you'll go to our website or Youtube channel and listen to it. It was called *Plagues and Punishment*. We discovered that there have indeed been times in history when God actively used such things as implements of His judgment upon sinners, no doubt, but it is pure speculation at best to suggest that this or any other modern disease or disaster is actually sent by God to punish us. When such events occurred in the Bible, they were preceded by warnings that associated the punishment with the prediction, and there was no doubt that these things were acts of God just as He had promised to perform those things to judge sin. There is nothing in the Bible that speaks specifically of this coronavirus or any other modern pandemic as something God would send in His wrath. Disasters occur because of the normal operation of natural law and the consequences of the Fall on creation (**Romans 8:20-22**).

With all of that said, God is certainly aware of all that is going on in our world today. Make no mistake—He is sovereign, and He is absolutely in control of all that goes on. We can know that God permits or allows these things to occur. But there is a difference in God allowing things to occur and God actively sending things as a form of punishment. God allows the consequences of the Fall and the continuing free will of mankind to occur. Today, there is no doubt that God can and does use events to His own glory, and one of the ways that is accomplished is by getting people's attention and bringing honest

souls to Him. Not only that, the Bible teaches that God sometimes uses such things as a means of testing and refining the faith of His own people—those who are already His children. Such is the case of the Roman persecution faced by the early church. In the **Hebrew** letter, the writer reminds the church that the trials and sufferings that they faced were a form of discipline by which the Lord was training and refining them as His children (**Hebrews 12**). Peter emphasized the same principle in his epistles and Paul had difficulties in his life that vexed and troubled him daily. His burden became so painful to bear that he begged the Lord three times to take it away (**II Corinthians 12:7-9**). But the Lord refused because through his trial, God wanted Paul to learn to depend upon the Lord and His grace to sustain him. In what way or to what extent God may be involved in using the current events of our world for His purposes or glory, those are divine mysteries that we cannot necessarily know. But one thing is for sure: when we face trials and life-changing events, people usually cry out to God for supernatural help. It is certainly my hope that good will come, despite the tragedy that we're seeing today, and that there will be a spiritual awakening throughout the land. Perhaps we're already seeing that in the lives of some. Perhaps in your life or mind, a needed revival will take place. But to what extent that occurs depends upon more than merely praying or crying out to God. That's really the point I want to get to today. Let's learn some important principles from history when it comes to appealing to God in our times of crisis. The ancient nation of Israel had a great deal of experience in that. Ethnic Israel, which constituted the people of God until spiritual Israel was revealed in Christ, faced many trials and calamities throughout their 2,000-year history. Much of their difficulty was self-imposed. They couldn't remain faithful to God for very long at a time and they would wander off into sin and even idolatry, getting themselves into some terrible messes. At times, God allowed enemy nations to attack them, to plunder and even enslave them. He allowed disease and pestilence to afflict them, drought and famine to impoverish them. When it got bad enough, they would once again cry out to God to deliver them. God would hear their pleas and rescue them, and you would think that they had learned their lesson and never gone back to it again. But if you know Old Testament history, you know that it wasn't very long before they were right back where they started. Right back in trouble again.

Some years after they possessed the Promised Land, Solomon became their king and he constructed the grand and glorious temple in Jerusalem. One night after the temple was dedicated, God appeared to Solomon. Knowing the tendency of His people to stray and forsake Him, God told the king this:

**II Chronicles 7:12-14 "...I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice. If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."**

This was a promise that God made to ancient Israel. It pertained to them in that particular context, and it is a promise that God made and kept throughout the days to come. I often hear this passage quoted today to encourage the world to pray to God in times of trouble. But we need to notice a few things about what God said to Solomon.

First of all, it's important to note that these were God's covenant people who would be crying out to Him. God made this promise to His own; not to the nations about them. In that dispensation, God dealt with the peoples of the earth on a national basis. He dealt with physical Israel. They were His special people, and consequently, all other nations were *aliens from the commonwealth of Israel* as Paul put it.

**Ephesians 2:12 “That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:”**

Today, God does not deal with man through a particular nation, but rather, a spiritual nation—the church—which is the true Israel of God. And just as God had a special covenant with the people of Israel back then, so He has a covenant with His spiritual Israel, the church, today. Because His Son Christ Jesus is the High Priest of this spiritual nation and is the mediator between us and God, the church has access to God that others are never promised.

The Bible teaches that God does not hear sinners. In **John 9**, we read where Jesus had healed a blind man and was later questioned by His doubters and skeptics. The man who had been healed pointed out that the miracle proved that Jesus was from God, that He was who He claimed to be:

**John 9:31 “Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.”**

You see, God does not hear just every prayer. His ears are not open to those who have no relationship to Him and who live outside of His covenant in sinful rebellion. The good news is that God *wants* to have that relationship with you. He *wants* to be your Father in the spiritual sense, and one of the great privileges that is afforded His children in Christ is that of Him eagerly listening to our prayers. I don't want to discourage anyone from praying; rather, I want to encourage you and anyone listening to be sure you're on praying terms with God through a relationship with Christ. He is the only way of access to the throne of God. There is no way to the Father except through the Lord Jesus Christ and God does not promise to hear just anyone's prayer. These were God's people who He told Solomon would be heard when they prayed--not the ungodly pagan and idolatrous people of the world.

Not only were they God's people by virtue of the special covenant He had with them. Notice here that the promise of God's help would be conditioned upon the repentance and promised faithfulness of the people when they cried out to Him. Let's read it again.

**II Chronicles 7:13-14 “If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”**

The thing that had to be dealt with was the people's sin. Then and only then did God promise to heal the land of Israel back then. They had to turn from their sin; not just cry out to God for help when they got into a bind. Unfortunately, that's the way we often treat God. Isn't that really the sad history of many of us spiritually? We almost look at God as a supernatural vending machine dispensing victory over our problems when they pop up. A cosmic bellhop who is waiting just down the hall when we summon Him, who comes when we ring the bell and ask for something. Or a genie in a bottle we can summon to straighten out our problems when they get to be more than we can handle.

But that's not how God operates. God told Solomon, *when my people called by my name humble themselves*—that is, cast off their pride and stubbornness. So many people live with very little regard for God on a regular basis. They certainly aren't living a clean and holy life because when things are well, they don't really need God. At least, that's what they think. They don't need God until they get into a

bind and want Him, in some great distress. But God said that His people must *humble themselves and turn from their sins*. That means *repentance*. That's a biblical definition of repentance: *to turn away from; to change one's mind and thus his direction; to stop sinning, to cease the sinful behavior*. It doesn't just mean that I regret the mess I made or the problem that's come about because of my behavior. It means being so sorry for the behavior itself that we completely turn away from it. Sorry for what that behavior has done to our relationship with God, sorry for how that behavior offended Him, sorry for what it has done to me and perhaps others spiritually. Godly sorrow leads one to turn away and repent of that behavior.

Friend, the most important prayer that God's people can pray is that people will turn their hearts to God in faith, repentance, and obedience. I pray for people's physical well-being, for their health. That people will survive and that we as a world will overcome this virus that we are now seeing. But the greatest and most important prayer that we can pray in any time of distress, in any type of uncertainty or trouble is that through it all that people's hearts will be turned to God where they need to be in faith, repentance, and obedience.

Listen to some of the wonderful passages in the **Psalms**. Remember that these were written from the perspective of one whose trust and faith is in the Lord. One who is living for the Lord in repentance and obedience.

**Psalm 4:3** "But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him."

**Psalm 66:17-19** "I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer."

**Psalm 85:1-9** "To the chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah.>> LORD, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah. Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger. Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee? Shew us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation. ¶ I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly. Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land."

This is speaking of times when God DID actually punish the people by sending trouble and distress upon them. The psalmist says that when they cried out to God He would hear, but *let us not return to our folly* or sin. The fact is, when sinful people who intend to keep living in sin call out to God, God is not listening. The Bible even says that their prayer is an abomination to Him. God detests their prayer. You see, His patience wears thin with those who give Him their words, but not their hearts. His patience wears thin with those who do not repent when they cry out to Him. The people of God learned that lesson a long time ago.

During the reign of King Jehoiakim, Judah experienced a terrible drought. It became so severe that the nation went into a period of great mourning. No matter where they looked, they could not find water.

The farmers could grow no crops, the land turned to dust, the times grew desperate. The prophet Jeremiah interceded on behalf of the people asking God to bring relief. But, you know, God refused. God prolonged the drought. Why?

**Jeremiah 15:6 “Thou hast forsaken me, saith the LORD, thou art gone backward: therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee, and destroy thee; I am weary with repenting.”**

Do you know what that means? God was tired of the back and forth. God was tired of delivering them only to have them forsake Him over and over again. God’s patience wears thin. We must be very careful about calling out to God without true repentance. God finally meted out destruction because He grew weary of listening to their empty pleas time and again.

What we need today is true revival. What people of this world today need is a true and lasting turn to God and His word, seeking salvation. Not merely *physically*; His *spiritual* salvation. Perhaps that’s where you are today. Perhaps that’s what you need at this point in your life. You need to give your heart and life to Christ and find the peace that transcends the fleeting circumstances of this life. Wouldn’t you like to be one of His people who can call out to Him and find refuge in Him? You can if in faith and repentance for the life you’ve lived, you’ll use this opportunity in this juncture of your life to in true faith and true repentance turn to the Lord and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. Have your sins washed away in His blood in baptism. You will then be *in Christ* (**Galatians 3:27**), which puts you in a unique relationship with God that others do not have. That through Christ, you can speak to your Father in prayer. You’ll have a new life and a new relationship with Him (**Romans 6:3-6**) and you’ll have the right to call upon Him as your Father and your Friend. If we can help you begin that new life and relationship, we sincerely want to do so.

Please reach out to us today and let us help you find what the Bible says concerning what you need to do in order to be saved. You see, the Lord hears those who in true faith and repentance turn to Him. He’s not merely there to bail people out of binds. The Lord is not just there when we think we need Him because trouble comes. The Lord wants a lasting, lifelong relationship with you. What I’m saying is that maybe you’ll use this opportunity to establish that relationship, to see your true need for the Lord, and turn to Him and become His child.

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