

Unanswered Prayers

The question “does God answer prayers” comes up regularly. As a Christian one would imagine that to be a rather innocuous question yet it seems to baffle many. The event of the past week involving the execution of Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran has dented the faith of some.

The question has been asked, “Why does God answer my little prayer requests, prayers that pale into insignificance in comparison, and yet millions prayed to have the life of Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran spared only to see them die. Why?”

To answer the question we first must accept that God is God. You may ask what does that mean? Simply, without acknowledging the existence of God, the question as to whether God answers prayers becomes mute and the relevance voided. Solomon declared that *...there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven...*¹ when God hardened the heart of Pharaoh there was a purpose in Him doing such. Does that mean God is cruel and the freedom of choice was taken away? No! Pharaoh had a choice – Scripture ascribes the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart to God on ten occasions and equally on ten other occasions where Pharaoh hardened his own heart.

In this instance, God had to free Israel – the plan for the redemption of all humanity had to continue – Jesus had to be born.

God always answers our prayers but not necessarily as we ask. Then why pray? In the book of Isaiah God makes this very profound statement –

*...For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways...as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts...*²

The issue is not about God not answering our prayers; the issue is in not understanding that God is Sovereign. Too often we just don’t get it. Christians (mankind) need to understand that God is supreme: He is self- determining and the Creator of all – yes! He created you and me.

*...You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, “He did not make me”; or the thing formed say of him who formed it “He has no understanding”?*³

*...Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.*⁴

¹ Ecclesiastes 3: 1 (NIVUK)

² Isaiah 55: 8-9 (NIV)

³ Isaiah 29: 16 (ESV)

⁴ Genesis 2: 7 (ESV)

To understand the Sovereignty of God is to completely surrender to His will and acknowledging that God is God. When you and I go before God in prayer, our petition generally suggests or propositions a course of action, however, God positions i.e. the prayer request gets rearranged according to His plan and purpose...*In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.*⁵

The thought of God as Sovereign is repugnant to the human carnal mind, yet as Christians when it comes to supposedly unanswered prayers, we quickly lose sight of who God truly is. We question His authority and our faith waivers.

If we examine the case of Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran great good has resulted in their incarceration and ultimate death. Both young men have repented and made tremendous progress in becoming role models but even more significantly the conversion of Chan resulted in God's Word being proclaimed throughout the world. This is due mainly because of the many prayers that were made for their clemency.

True, the prayer to spare their life was not answered, but God's higher purpose was attained. David Chan was born again as Jesus instructed...*no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again...* the Gospel was preached and many others came to repentance and were baptised into Christ.

One may argue, that the behaviour of President Joko Widodo was one of pure callousness and lacking completely in mercy and one would be justified in thinking such. However, the President was well within his rights and yes, his heart was hardened. Nevertheless, David Chan and Myuran Sukumaran understood that the penalty for smuggling drugs into Indonesia was death and in this instance the *Piper had to be paid*. Both men had to bear the unfavourable consequence of their action.

No matter what ones theological understanding is of life after death – Jesus has authority over both David Chan and Myuran Sukumaran ...*The Eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.*⁶

In conclusion, our prayers now need to be for the families of David Chan and Myuran Sukumaran, so that the Spirit of Peace may be upon them and that together, we may learn to understand and submit wholeheartedly to our Sovereign God and to His higher purpose.

We need to appreciate that our prayers are answered – not our will but according to the will of God.

Blessed be our God.

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⁵ Proverbs 16: 9 (NIV)

⁶ Deuteronomy 33: 27 (NIV)

