

Does Faith Mean We'll Always Get Our Way?

Have you ever seen a "faith healer" in action? It would seem that they can cure practically every illness. Claiming to possess a Divine anointing, they nonetheless come up short from time to time and a poor, unfortunate soul is not "healed." So as not to be discredited among their loyal and generous supporters, they simply claim that any failure is the result of a lack of faith on the part of the individual whom they are trying to "heal."

One day while in the hospital during my wife, Shannon's illness, we received a letter from someone who passed by. We didn't open it until later in the day but when we did we found it contained instructions on how to, in essence, "grab hold of Jesus and not let him go until He heals your disease." The implication seemed to be that if you really want to recover from an illness, you might want to forget all of this medical stuff and if you don't recover, it's because you haven't prayed hard enough or don't have enough faith.

These two illustrations prompted the title of this article. If we have faith, real, deep down, soul-stirring, uplifting, powerful faith, will we always get our way? If we don't get our way, for instance, if we pray for recovery from illness but it doesn't happen, does that necessarily mean that we did not have enough faith?

In answer to this question, let us first consider the apostle Paul. In II Corinthians 12:1-7 he wrote of his thorn in the flesh. Although there is a lack of universal agreement as to what this was, it is clear that it was troublesome to him for in verse 8 he said that he asked the Lord three times for its removal. The Lord replied, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." (II Corinthians 12:9). In other words, Paul did not get what he wanted. Was it because he was weak in the faith? No person with even a smattering of Bible knowledge would say so. Still, he didn't get his way, did he?

Now think about this. In Philippians 2:27 we read of Epaphroditus. "For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow." Epaphroditus had been ill but he recovered. Does that necessarily imply that he had greater faith than any other Christian?

Here's another consideration. In Luke 22:42, when Jesus was praying in solitude to His Father, He asked for the cup of suffering to be removed. Being human, Jesus knew he would feel every ounce of pain that would course through His body in His persecution and death. He asked for another way to accomplish the task of paying the price for the sins of mankind. It didn't work out that way. Jesus suffered beatings, whippings and other physical assault and, ultimately, the cross. Did JESUS lack faith? He didn't get that for which He asked. Should HE have prayed and believed harder?

There's a common thread that weaves through these three examples. In II Corinthians 12:9, the Lord said directly to Paul, "my grace is sufficient for thee." In Philippians 2:27, Paul said that God showed mercy. In Jesus' prayer, He uttered, "if thou be willing" and "not my will, but Thine, be done." In Paul's case, he needed the thorn in the flesh to keep him from becoming puffed up or vain regarding all of the revelations he had received. In the case of Epaphroditus, he was greatly needed by Paul. Obviously he eventually died (Hebrews 9:27) but for this particular time noted in Philippians 2, he was especially needed. In Jesus' case, He had to die in order for God's plan of redemption to be carried out. What is the guiding principle in these examples? It is that the will of God WILL be done.

Does faith mean we'll always get our way? If we as faithful Christians pray and pray and pray and believe and believe and believe with all of our hearts that God can providentially provide for recovery from our illness and yet we do not recover, was our faith weak? OR, does it perhaps take MORE faith to accept this lack of recovery as what is best in the eyes of God for us and thus serenely and thankfully resign ourselves to God's will?