

# St. Mary's Sermons

Matthew 26:45-54

Good Friday

14/4/17

My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?

What an alarming question for God to ask God. And there is no immediate answer. No word from heaven. No miracle. No sign, except for the darkness itself, even though it was only the middle of the afternoon. In this moment, Jesus legitimized for all time the need for explanation. He also demonstrated that the explanation may not come when we think we need it most.

Although we will never suffer in the way that Jesus did on that day, there are Good Friday seasons in all our lives, when pain disappointment, confusion or a sense of spiritual abandonment cause us to ask God the ultimate question Why?

There are only three times in the whole of the New Testament when Jesus prayed and did not receive an answer. We looked at the first occasion last night, when we thought about Jesus praying in the garden of gethsemane, for the cup of suffering to be taken from him. Now, just some twenty-four hours later we find him on the cross, once again crying out to his father but being met with complete and total silence. The only other time we know about that Jesus prayed and did not receive an answer is his prayer, recorded in John 17, that all those who believe in him should be one. Sadly, two thousand years later this prayer still remains unanswered.

I must admit that I have never really thought about it before and it came as a bit of a surprise to realise that even Jesus did not always have all his prayers answered. And it seems to somewhat flie in the face of Jesus confident assertion at the tomb of his friend Lazarus when he prayed Father I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me.

I suppose the tendency on Good Friday is to skip through the details somewhat of what actually happened to Jesus, not least because it was so brutal, that it is hard for us to grasp, so that we can focus on the important implications of his death. Of course, we are right to spell out clearly the reason why Jesus died on the cross, the fact that he paid the ultimate price for our sin; that he gave his life in order that we could be put right with God and to ponder on the mystery of God's amazing love for us with grateful hearts. And I certainly do not want to minimize this in any way and I know that we will be focusing on this aspect of the cross during our open-air service outside the library later on and again during the Stations of the Cross.

But I want us to stop for a few moments, before we go on to think about what Jesus death achieved, so that we can consider this important question why God does not always answer prayer. There is a whole host of reasons why God does not answer prayer. This is a very big topic, so sadly we have not got anywhere near enough time this morning to look at in detail at them all. So I'm going to mention some of the reasons why very briefly

**Some prayers aren't answered because they contract others.** Somebody may well be praying that it won't rain because they want a nice day for a special event, while the farmer just down the road may be praying equally hard for rain for his crops!

**Some prayers aren't answered because they would be detrimental to the world and to the lives of others.** The storms against which we may sometimes pray are vital to the wellbeing of millions of people. Storms are the air conditioning system of the earth, keeping the climate and the ecosystem in balance. Without storms the tropics would become significantly hotter, gradually causing desertification and the artic would become far colder. These

would be just a few of the dire consequences that would occur if every prayer against every storm were answered today. Can God control weather systems? Yes of course he is sovereign and omnipotent. He sent rain on Noah, drought on Ahab and calmed the storm on Galilee. Metrological miracles do take place but if God answered all such prayers the balance of creation would be thrown off kilter with disastrous consequences. The film Bruce Almighty portrays both reasons very clearly in a humorous way.

**Some prayers are not answered because creation is subject to frustration and has not yet been fully liberated from its bondage to decay.** Tragically life in such an environment is inevitably going to be difficult at times. We all want a nice easy life and tend to blame God when things go wrong, completely overlooking the clear teaching of Jesus who told us, that in this world you will have trouble and Peter's warning that we should not be surprised at the painful trials that you are suffering as though something strange is happening to you.

**Some prayers are not answered the way that we think they should be because our understanding and expectation of God are wrong.** Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's speech to king Nebuchadnezzar explaining their refusal to worship his grotesque idol reminds us to trust in God more than we believe in miracles. Like these men we should completely trust in God who is able to save us. We insist on the possibility of miracles but to such faith we must add faithfulness so that even if God does not come to our aid and our prayers are not answered and we end up being plunged into the fiery furnace we will still trust God.

Some of the other reasons why God does not answer our prayers include:

Perhaps God has something better for us

Perhaps our motives are selfish

Perhaps God is allowing us to struggle to draw us into a deeper relationship of trust.

Perhaps a positive answer to our prayer would violate someone else's free will. The bible depicts an Almighty God who continually chooses to limit his own power and refuses to override the free will that he has given us.

And finally, some prayers are not answered because we are all involved in a spiritual battle against the devil and although he was defeated by Jesus on the cross he does not give up easily. Remember that the disciples were not able to cast the evil spirit out of the boy.

On Good Friday, the crowd wrongly assumed that the silence from heaven, in response to Jesus prayer, proved that God was powerless to do anything to save him and that Jesus was not God's son after all. And when he died they thought that that was the last that they were going to hear of Jesus of Nazareth. As we will see Jesus would ultimately prove them to be completely misguided.