

# CHRIST'S MYSTERY STORIES-1

Desmond Ford

There are Bible promises about prayer that sound absolute: Whatever we ask for we shall receive. To misunderstand such promises leads to much woe. The Bible says we must ask according to God's will and ways.

In John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), the hero, Christian, is trotting up the Hill of Difficulty, and finds a pleasant little arbor on the way. He tarries a while and is refreshed. He even falls asleep there.

One of the things that convinces us of the great reality of God's love for us is, that while life is often tough, there are many things that come to our Hill of Difficulties that ease our burdens and lift us. They rest us for a while, and then we can go on with our upward struggles.

I want to discuss with you some very tough situations. However, when we begin to understand them correctly, we will be saved a great deal of pain.

## Ask for anything

Six times during the night before his crucifixion, our Lord said, "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (John 14:14 NIV). See also John 16:24.

That "anything" is quite a word.

Now, if we read the Bible carelessly, we can read it to our own destruction. The Bible is like a map. It must be carefully studied if we are going to reach our destination.

"Ask anything? **Anything**, Lord? OK, empty out all the seas. Take down the moon, because it shines on me when it's at the full and wakes me up early. And, Lord, there are certain people I think are not any advantage to this city. I'd be rather pleased if you gave them rest this night—for keeps.

"Lord, you did say **anything**. What about a trillion dollars

by mail. Next week will do. I'm not in a hurry.

"Anything? Make me young again, when energy was overflowing. And take away all my responsibilities, but don't give me a sense of guilt. You said anything, Lord. You said it six times."

## Whatever you ask for

We need to understand Scripture aright. We can read the Bible to our own destruction. In Mark 11, Jesus says:

"I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." (Mark 11:23-24)

**Whatever?** Lord, I want the IQ of a genius by midday!

## Understanding Christ's promises

How do we understand these promises of Christ?

Is Jesus saying, "Look, you can have God's omnipotence, even though you don't have God's omniscience"? Think what that would mean. It would put idiots on the throne of the universe!

Would it be safe to live here on earth if we did have the omnipotence of God and could do anything we wanted? We'd

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just open our mouth and ask for something and it would be done. In comparison, Superman would fade away into nothingness.

But if we had God's omnipotence without his omniscience, that would put idiots on the throne of the universe. Nothing could be more fatal.

### **In Christ's name**

What does Jesus mean: "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (John 14:14 NIV)?

The clue is in the verse: "In my name."

"Name" in the Bible always means character. It is only another way of saying, "If you ask anything in harmony with what I am."

God is not primarily in the earth-moving business, though he does move mountains occasionally. When Jesus talks about mountains being cast into the sea and trees being plucked up, we must see here metaphor and figure. These metaphors are referring to mountains of difficulty that impede our walk or our duties.

### **About the name of God**

There are riders, or conditions, in Christ's promises.

We need to know about the name of God. "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (John 14:14 NIV).

What is his name?

"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. . . ." (Exodus 34:6-7)

We need to know that God is holy, God is love, that God is wise, compassionate, patient, good, that God is gentle. We need to remember Jesus saying, "I am meek and lowly in heart." (Matthew 11:29 KJV).

### **In harmony with God**

Therefore, all my prayers have to be in harmony with what God is, what Christ is. Any prayers that are going to get me out of the bracket of being meek and lowly are not going to be answered 'Yes.'

This is one of the reasons God allows problems in our lives. God must constantly keep us cut down to size, lest we get to the place where he can't help us. If we become too big in our own estimation, too wise in our own wisdom, then, at that point, we are done for.

God keeps us cut down to size with the weedeater of trouble. Trouble does not mean that God is angry with us. Trouble means that God is greatly interested in our education.

### **According to God's will**

The apostle John spells out the major condition of prayer very clearly:

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that **if we ask anything according to his will**, he hears

us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. (1 John 5:14-15 my emphasis)

If our Lord Jesus—sinless, spotless, and immaculate; all wise, all knowing, and all loving—had to say, "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42 KJV), how much more people such as ourselves?

Twice the Lord's prayer warns us: First, "Thy will be done" Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2); and, second, "And lead us not into temptation" (Matthew 6:13; Luke 11:4).

I can't think of any bigger temptation than to have God's omnipotence **without** his omniscience. That would be a terrible temptation. We'd do so much that would be foolish, so much that would be wrong, so much that would be unfair.

### **Scripture teaches conditional prayer**

So when we read these "absolute" promises about "whatever we ask," we need to remember that when the devil used Scripture wrongly to tempt Jesus, Jesus said, "It is written again" (Matthew 4:7). We need to take **everything** that God says on a topic if we are going to understand it correctly.

From the beginning of the Bible to the end, promises of prayer are always conditional. They are conditional on the outcome being to the glory of God and for the good of the world—and only God can tell what those things are.

With our limited vision, we cannot always tell what is the best. You only have to hold up a fifty-cent piece to your eye and you can blot out the whole sun. We, with our earthly, carnal desires and wishes, constantly blot out the Son.

