

Is Anything Too Hard for the Lord?

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I want to talk on a subject very important to the Lord's people. I want to give a talk on why God seems so far away; why when we pray sometimes God seems so far away, and why generally to Christians there's a sense of remoteness. I want to talk about it tonight, and I think it will be worth your hearing.

This morning, in the 18th of Genesis, the Lord appeared unto Abraham in the plains of Mamre as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day. And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him. When he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door and bowed himself to the ground. He said, My Lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant. And they said unto him, where is Sarah thy wife? There were three of them, and now it's become one. He said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life, and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door. She was supposed to be inside, but she was listening. They're all alike. And Sarah heard it in the tent door which was behind him.

Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age, and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Therefore, Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old, shall I have pleasure, my Lord, also being old? And the Lord said unto Abraham, wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, shall I of a surety bear a child, I which am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord? The time appointed I will return unto thee according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not, for she was afraid. And he said, nay, but you did laugh.

I want to take a question from verse 14. Is anything too hard for the Lord? This is what is called, of course, a rhetorical question, which means simply that it contains its answer in itself. And of course, there is only one answer.

Now, God asked this question as a rebuke and a promise, and His deed supported His words. We might as well be realistic enough to admit that much religious talk is fanciful and unrelated to reality. The Christian message carries its own power in it, and where there is faith and obedience, that power emerges into practical deeds, as we'll see here.

Now, God asked the question, Is anything too hard for the Lord? And I have examined into this very closely, so I'm not uttering mere shreds of opinion. I guessed when I read this that the word hard there in the original Hebrew was a bit different from our word hard when we say, for instance, that it's hard to lift something. I figured that wouldn't be the word used, and I looked it up and found that it is not the word used. There are two meanings to this word, hard and difficult, and they're not quite the same.

Hard means tough and severe, as when it says, Pharaoh made their lives bitter with hard bondage. The hard bondage was the bondage where they labored as slaves, hard labors, the word we use. He was sentenced to hard labor. It means that he had, it wasn't

necessarily to do any skillful work, but he had to do work that required bone labor, hard muscle.

Then the word hard means great, difficult, and wonderful, and that's the word that is used here. Is anything too great for God? Is anything too difficult for God? Is anything too wonderful for God to do? That's the word here.

Now, you'll notice that this question here wasn't one of physical energy. It didn't take muscle and power. It was a difficult thing. Sarah herself knew and chuckled over the idea, as it was proper that she might have. You see the difference, don't you, between a thing being hard and a thing being difficult.

Let me illustrate it from the world of sport. Take a weightlifter, a great muscular fellow with a huge chest and bulging biceps. He lifts weights. I don't know enough about it to know how many hundred pounds, but I understand that one fellow lifted over three hundred, perhaps much more than that, but I do know at least that much. He lifted straight up over his head.

Well, now, that wasn't difficult. Anybody could do that that could do it. All you had to do was reach down, pick it up, push it up in the air. If provided, of course, you had the physical muscle, you were tough enough to do it. That's what you call hard, meaning that it takes great energy.

But let's look at another man. Let's look at a man, why it bothers him, God knows, that never bothered me and will bother me now, but there is a man, a businessman, a hardworking man, he might even be a president. And there he is out on a beautiful little green, almost as beautiful as a green carpet, about the size of this platform. And right in the middle of that, or maybe off a little to one side, there's a hole, a cup. And there lies a little white ball there. And his job is to get that little white ball to fall into that little cup.

Now, it isn't going to take the muscle of a weightlifter. There's nothing hard about that, but it's difficult. It's so difficult that you don't even dare sneeze, nor make any noise while he gets down on his knees like a devotee burning incense to a rubber ball, and sights along to see just where that falls. And then, with great difficulty, taps it toward the cup.

And the last time I played golf was 20 years ago, I think. And I got that ball all over the green, every place but in the cup. I threw my golf clubs down and said to Mr. Lessard, with whom I was then playing, this is the last, and brother, it was. It wasn't, it didn't take muscle, but it took a coordination and skill that not only I didn't have, but never could develop. There's a difference, you see, between hard and difficult. It's difficult to sink a shot, but it's hard to lift a heavy weight.

Now, nothing is hard for God by either definition. God having all of the energy there is in the universe can, of course, naturally do the hardest thing there is to do. And God having all the wisdom there is naturally has all the skill there is to do it.

Now let's look at why some things are hard for us. There are four or five reasons why they're hard for us, difficult or hard. Some are hard because they require energy that we

just don't have, it's beyond us, either physical energy, mental energy, and it's beyond us. We just don't have it, so it's hard and we can't do it.

But is anything too hard for God, or it requires a knowledge beyond our store? For instance, could you have sent up that rocket, that ill-fated rocket that went up a few hundred miles and then came back? I couldn't have. I wouldn't have the remotest idea what to do. The nearest I could get to it would be a slingshot or throwing a rock in the air. I don't know how they do that. I don't know. And I don't feel any sense of inferiority. It isn't my field; I'm not interested in it. I know some things they don't know.

So you've got to have knowledge to do some things, and if you don't have that knowledge you can't do it. But is it possible to conceive of anything that requires a knowledge that God doesn't have, when God knows all there is to know instantly and effortlessly?

And then third, it may require a wisdom beyond us, for you see, there's a difference between knowledge and wisdom. Man may be very wise and not very knowledgeable, or he may be knowledgeable and not very wise.

Alexander Pope, in the oft-quoted little jingle, talked about the learned man whose head was full of knowledge, but he didn't know what to do with it. He said, he's a bookish blockhead, ignorantly read, with loads of learned lumber in his head. And that means he has lots of knowledge but no wisdom and doesn't know what to do with what he knows.

Well, it may be that you have knowledge about how to do a thing, but the wisdom escapes you. But God possesses infinite wisdom.

And then maybe there are so many enemies, for instance, running to make a touchdown. Now it wouldn't be hard or difficult either, but it's both because of the enemies that are pitted against you. You grab it and you take two jumps and somebody's on you. Well the enemies are there, that's the game. I don't care much for football, really, but then that's the game, I understand. One fellow wants to get the pigskin across, and two or three or ten other fellows determined he can't. So they block him.

And the devil is a great player, he blocks constantly, only he's dead serious about it. And when you try to do something, he blocks it, he hinders you. And he pits himself against you and often brings you down, so you can't do it.

But is it conceivable that the great God Almighty, the great God who telleth the stars and calleth them all by name and knoweth the number thereof, is it possible that God can be stopped? No, God doeth as He pleases and the armies of the heaven and the armies of the earth, and there's nobody that can stop Him or say, what are you doing? He has His way in the whirlwind and the storm and the clouds and the dust of His feet.

He's the sovereign God, and all the devils in hell could deploy themselves in whatever formation they chose, like players on a football field, and God Almighty can walk through triumphantly toward His goal, because He is God.

Jesus Christ walked straight toward the cross without hindrance, and rose from the cross without hindrance, and went to the right hand of God without hindrance, though they were trying to hinder Him all the way. You see, God demonstrates His power and His wisdom.

He said, is there anything too hard for me, and then proceeded to do something so difficult that nobody in the world could do it, cause a ninety-year-old woman to have a child.

And later on, there was Pharaoh. I've just been going through the book of Exodus on my knees. I've been reading it in my room down on my knees. And then God talked to me about Moses and Pharaoh and Aaron and the ten plagues and the power of God. Wonderful what God did.

No wonder Israel talks about it down to this day. No wonder it's woven itself into history and into literature and into music. No wonder we sing about it. God opened the Red Sea and took Israel through and cast up the enemy dead upon the shore. God showed what he could do.

Later on there was Sennacherib. There he was with all of his mass people. It was like, say, it was as if England, yonder, England or the United States, were to decide they were going to have war with little Israel over there, tiny little Israel. There's no parallel, certainly, between the Israel of Sennacherib's day and the Israel that we know today over there.

But let us imagine that if a country the size of ours, with our unlimited potential, should decide to make war on little Israel, well, how are you going to stop them? How are you going to stop Sennacherib? How are you going to stop it?

Hezekiah the king got a nasty, blasphemous, obscene letter from one of the underlings of Sennacherib, and he read it out loud to the embarrassment of the women and to the horror of the king and those around him. And Hezekiah took that letter, turned it around and said, O God, read this. And God read it, and God sent Isaiah to say, don't you worry about that, I'll handle it.

And so, the angel of death spread his wings on the blast and breathed in the face of the foe as he passed. And the eyes of the sleeper waxed deadly and chilled, and his chest deep at once and forever grew still. And the might of the Gentile, unsmoked by the Lord, melted like snow at the breath of the Lord. God Almighty can handle it. So he proved that He can do it, and He's done it all down the years, He's proved it.

Now, why do we see so little of this? Why do we see so little of God's ability to do the hard thing and His ability to do the difficult thing? Why do we see so little of it?

I want to read you a passage here. It was Jesus talking, and He said, I tell you a truth. Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land. But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.

And if that isn't bad enough, many lepers were in Israel in the days of Elisha the prophet. But none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. And all lay in the synagogue when they heard that these things were filled with wrath. Notice later why they were filled with wrath.

But notice why when Jesus came to Israel with wonder at His fingertips, wonders, ability to do the hard thing, the difficult thing, at His fingertips, why was it that Israel saw so little of it?

Well, Jesus said the reason may be noticed, may be gotten, is hinted at, and may be gathered from the way God worked back in Israel. He said in the time of Elijah there were lots of widows in Israel. And yet those Israelitish widows had gotten accustomed to satisfying their religious yearnings with stories of other days. They looked back at other and grander times. They talked about Pharaoh and the Red Sea and Aaron and all the others. They no doubt were well versed in the history of Israel and the power of God for Israel, but they had gotten accustomed to satisfying their religious yearnings by talking of something that had happened and was now history.

And so there was a closed heaven. God never spoke to them. And when He had a prophet that He wanted to get, have entertained and wanted to feed, there were widows in Israel by the hundreds, maybe thousands in Israel, but there wasn't one of them God could go to. They were God's chosen people, and they were religious above all on the face of the earth, those Jews were. But God had to leave all the widows in Israel to sit.

And He went to Zarephath of Sidon and picked a pagan woman who was not of the seed of Israel and sent Elijah there because that pagan woman brought a fresh mind to the contemplation of divine things. She brought a fresh mind and when the man of God came to her, he said, give me to eat. And she fed him. After his experience by the brook here, she fed him and God fed her.

And Jesus said, don't you see, you'll read your Bible, can't you interpret it? Don't you know that all the power there is lie in these 10 fingers of mine, all the power I have it. Why is there so little of it manifest? Why was there so little manifest in the days of Elijah? There were lots of widows in Israel, but not one of them got any help because they were women of closed minds and non-expectation.

Then He went on and rubbed it in further still and said there were many lepers in Israel in the days of Elijah, but they went uncleansed because they had become accustomed to living with their sores. This is the tragedy of an old church or the tragedy of an old denomination.

We get used to living with our sores. The sophists come along, and the casuists and they spin a philosophy, a rationalizing. They rationalize a philosophy of explanation about why things aren't better than they are. And the result is that we get accustomed to living with our leprosy.

They were orthodox, those lepers, but they were lepers. They were orthodox and they believed all they should have believed creedally, but their minds were closed. But a Syrian general brought an open mind, a Syrian general that was accustomed to kneeling

in the house of a false god, went to the prophet Elisha and Elisha told him to go bathe in the river.

At first he was angry. At least he had enough gumption to get mad. He was angry about it and then when he saw that he was wrong, he humbled himself and went and bathed and lo, came with his flesh as the flesh of a little child.

God healed Naaman the pagan, the Syrian, and left the lepers in Israel uncleansed, though nothing was too hard for God to do. God could have spoken the word, and a wave of healing would have run throughout Israel like the light at the rising of the sun. And every leper would have been instantaneously healed, but they couldn't take it because their minds were closed. They were religious people, and they had gotten used to their sores. And today that's our trouble.

Is anything too hard for the Lord? No, impossible that it should be, but we bring God closed minds. And the customary becomes the normal in religious churches. The customary, all you have to do is to make a statement that sounds a little bit away from the customary and they challenge you immediately.

All you have to do is to suggest something that's a little bit off the beam and that is a little bit off the regular path of things, the custom thing, and they're raising their eyebrows and zut-zut-zutting and chuck-chuck-clucking and saying, what's the matter with our pastor?

The lepers in Israel went uncleansed and the widows in Israel went unblessed, while the woman in Sidon and Naaman the Syrian were blessed of Jehovah God.

And today, we have whatever is customary, that's normal, and we get a psychology of the customary. We can change our body model in the automobile. Women can change their body models very rapidly if somebody in Paris says they're to do it.

And we make all sorts of changes, but when it comes to God, we expect God to behave Himself and to act according to the way He's been acting and forgetting that He's been acting like that because we haven't had an open mind to allow God to assert His power. Today we've got the closed minds, and yet we're orthodox, and yet we're unbelievers.

You know, there are two kinds of unbelief. There is the bold, arrogant unbelief of the sinner who comes out and says, I don't believe your Bible, I don't believe your God. If there's any God, why is there leprosy and polio and war and all that kind of thing? No, thank you, I've had enough, come, let's have a beer. I don't want any more of your religion, I've had enough, I don't believe in it. That's the man Jesus said, I wouldst thou wert hot or cold. There's your cold man. He doesn't believe in it at all and says so outright.

Then there is the unbelief of the religious man. He wouldn't say, I don't believe the Bible; he does believe the Bible. He buys them and gives them as presents and reads them assiduously. He doesn't say, I don't believe in your God. He does believe in God.

But he just can't believe for anything new. He can't believe that God means us now, that he means him. He can't believe that this is the hour, this is the day.

God to him is always historic, and the Bible a historic book. He can't bring himself to believe in the God of the present, the living God, the God of today and tomorrow. He's perfectly willing to believe in the God of yesterday.

Believing in the God of yesterday makes us orthodox. Believing in the God of today releases God's power into the midst. We bring God a closed mind and we have developed a chronic non-expectation.

I think that's generally what could be said, we have a chronic non-expectation. We have a psychology of continuing defeat. We don't expect anything else, and so we begin to make terms with our defeat, make terms with our captors.

We begin to learn to live in Babylon, the Church is learning to live in Babylon, slowly learning the language of the Babylonians. Blessed gorgeous old Hebrew, we still use it at home, but out in the marketplaces we use the language of Babylon. Because we don't have God Almighty's power released, why, we have to think our way through and confer our way through.

You want to see a pastor; he says he's in conference. We're conferring our way through. And we're acting as if Christ was still dead, instead of having risen from the dead. You know what I think? I think that we ought to begin to magnify the resurrected Christ more than we do.

Dr. Walter Wilson has a brother, Dyke Wilson, he's been writing me lately and sending me things. He's quite a character, really, and there's one thing that he insists upon, and that is that the cross is past, and that he did his work there, and that's over with. But that one point where we should place our interest is the throne, that the Jesus of the throne, the Christ of the throne, the resurrected, glorified Savior, should be the object of our interest now. Not back to the cross, but up to the throne.

I believe he's perfectly right. And I think that we are wrong in this. I don't mean to say that I stand here to give sight-unseen approval to everything that Mr. Dyke Wilson believes. I merely quote him as saying that this is where his emphasis falls.

And incidentally, that's where the emphasis fell in the early days of the Alliance. And that's where it fell even when I got into the Alliance 40 years ago. They were then talking about, Jesus can do everything, Jesus is risen from the dead, the Lord is on the throne, he can do anything, is anything too hard for Jehovah?

That's the way they were talking then. But we soon got over that, and now we're acting as if Christ was still dead. Why do the children of the King go mourning all the day? Because they think the King's oldest son is still in the grave.

He is not in the grave, but He is long ago risen from the dead, and all power is given unto Him in heaven and in earth, and that Power is waiting for you and me to dare to put

away our psychology of non-expectation, put away the mental attitude of being satisfied with defeat.

What's the result of this Christ that's still dead? What is the result of this psychology of defeat? Well, the devil is satisfied, that's sure enough, quite satisfied. And I believe also, and this is terrible, that the Spirit is grieved. I believe the Holy Ghost is grieved.

Did you notice that when Jesus charged Israel with unbelief, their wrath burned against Him, and they took Him out to throw him over a cliff and kill Him. They said, We're orthodox, what do you mean? And believing to them means accepting a creed.

Believing to Jesus means accepting a creed and expecting something from the God of the creed. They could go halfway, but they couldn't go the rest of the way. And it was this charge that caused them to snarl and grind their teeth at Jesus.

And there was the animosity that grew in intensity until they killed Him at last on a cross. But the God that finds nothing hard raised Him from the dead easily the third day. But the Spirit is grieved, my friends.

The Spirit is grieved because of our unbelief. We look to each other for help instead of to God. And our altar fires burn very, very low, and we are forced to look to the flesh and misplace our confidence.

Israel was always running to Egypt for help, looking somewhere and sending to this heathen king and saying, come over and help us. And they were always defeated when they did. God said, you're My people and I'll look after you, and He says the same to us today. So, we're driven to the methods of the world.

This may shock some of you and make some of you downright mad. And if it does, don't let it bother you, I don't mind at all. But I am going to studiously stay away from all discussions on methodology. I'm going studiously to stay away from it altogether.

Maybe it has a modicum of good in it, but it seems to me that when we accept without knowing it the belief that Jesus is still dead, and we accept the customary as the normal, and we get a psychology of non-expectation and don't expect heaven to open, then we develop methods. If God were to open heaven, we might have to get some methods to hold things together, you know.

The Methodists were called Methodists because they had methods. But they had methods to take care of a glowing, wondrous power that had come. But we don't have the power, but we're trying to generate it by methods. And it won't work, my brethren, it'll never work.

If a young couple marries and gets into a tiny little house and babies begin to come, and one every year, they're going to have to have a bigger house. And they're going to have to have methods of looking after them. They're going to have to have budget, watch their money, and change some things, and live a little bit more according to the book. But it's to take care of expanding life.

But suppose two silly young people were to marry and say, now we'd like a house full of children, let's get a budget. And also let's build two nurseries and three extra bedrooms. You can't have life by a budget, and you can't have life by a method.

And yet the Church of Christ has turned to methodology, and we act as if Jesus Christ was dead. If Christ is not risen, why monkey with the whole business anyhow? If Christ is not risen, why try to keep a church going at all? If Christ is not risen, we're of all men most miserable. Let us eat, drink, and be merry, and have as good a time as we can before we die.

But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept. He is risen, and if He's risen, we don't need these other things. They got our confidence misplaced; you see.

Whole magazines have gone over to methodology in recent times. The Alliance Witness is one of the few that's still holding on to the editorial position that we ought to feed the souls of men. You can learn how to pet and how to make dates and how to build buildings and how to heat the parsonage. You can learn anything from the magazines now. They've gone over to methodology. Methodology without the Holy Ghost is a sepulcher, a whited sepulcher full of bones.

But where there's faith, there's God. And we ought to take this seriously and do some real repenting, my brethren. We ought to do some real repenting. We ought to call a moratorium on requests and do some real repenting, for the Spirit is waiting, hovering over chaos, ready to say, let there be light when we'll believe Him. Let's repent.

Let's repent of our mentality that takes things as they are, as things as they should be, and accept the customary as the normal, forgetting that God says, talk not about the old things, lo, I will do a new thing, now shall it spring forth.

I will even make a way in the wilderness and streams and the desert, and I will plant the chitaw tree at the top of the mountains, and I will do the impossible things, for I am God.

That's our God, my brethren. That's the God we have. That's the Christ we have. Let's have an afternoon of repentance. Let's go to God and ask him to forgive us.

Israel got mad when Jesus talked like this to them. Are you going to do it that way, or are you going to humble yourself and ask God to give you a refreshed mind.

A psychology of non-expectation, chronic defeatism, with Christ at the right hand of God, looking down eagerly, ready to help us in the power of the Holy Ghost right here in our midst? Why can't we believe?

Let's repent, and let's ask God to blow away the fog that shrouds us and take the dust off our souls and remove this miserable business and dare to believe again, dare to believe again.

Then when we are believing and the grace of God is flowing, we may have to look around for channels to let it flow into. That's normal and right. Paul did that, so he had

his methods. But he didn't try to substitute methods for the Holy Ghost. Let's not do that, either. Let's look to Jesus Christ, risen and glorified, and expect him to do the impossible for us. Amen

Brother McAfee, I'm going to close differently this morning.

Dear friends, you've heard me, some of you, 30 years, which means, I suppose that I have to preach twice as hard to get half as much impression. When we get used to things, we're used to them. Are there those here who will say, I feel that in the measure you have described me, I feel that there is that sense of acceptance of conditions instead of daring to believe God boldly for my own life, for my home, for my business, for the Church.

I want God to release power into my life and into my home and church and business and life. And I admit that I've got this psychology of unbelief, and I want to be delivered from it. I want to bring to Jesus Christ these days just ahead an open mind and a sharp expectation. I want you to pray for me.

Are there those who will say, pray for me, Pastor, will you stand where you are, please? Is it clear? It's a confession that this dull unbelief has spread over your mind to some degree. It's not a confession of outbroken sins, but of this that Israel had, non-expectation, chronic defeatism. Don't expect God to do anything, and consequently He doesn't.

And you want to be delivered from it. You want to ask God somehow to throw you out into a crisis where He has to help you. And you're ready to be daring and bold enough to pray that He will.

O God, God our Father, thou knowest we're followers of thy Son. We know we are, and we're not backing out, and we're not allowing the devil to tell us we aren't. We know we are. We're known of him because we know him, and we bless Thee.

But O thou knowest, Father, the chronic non-expectation. Dear Lord, we are as Israel was in some measure anyhow. We don't expect anything from Thee. We pray and pray and pray and pray the same words, Wednesday after Wednesday, and expect nothing. Forgive us, Lord, forgive us.

For all these who now stand saying, saying, pray for me, I do lift up my heart to Thee, and pray for myself too, O God. O thou knowest, Father, how easy it is to get into a mental rut, so easy to let yesterday dictate tomorrow, and let things that were, decide things that will be.

But Thou hast said, Thou art a God who maketh all things new, and we pray that Thou will touch the hearts of all these friends and give them a faith that will rise and dare to begin to believe Thee to do the unexpected and even the impossible. For Thou art the God of the impossible.

O God, break out, even over the next days upon us here, in such measure, in such fullness, that there will be, that Satan will begin to feel ajar, that he'll know that he's not

running things. He'll know that Thou hast risen. Bear Thy mighty arm, O God, and give us faith to trust Thee, that we may not grieve Thee by our chronic unbelief.

Everybody stand, please.

Now, Father, we ask that Thou will bring us to the house of God tonight, after an afternoon of penitence and waiting on Thee. Bring us to the house of God tonight. Bring in others and give us a wonderful, refreshing, glorious time together.

And now may grace and mercy and peace from the Triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost be with us forever.