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## **"Be Careful What You Wish For" 2 Kings 2:1-12, Mark 9:2-9**

— Elisha wanted a double portion of Elijah's share of God's spirit. Peter, James, and John wanted to be Jesus's top three disciples. Both of these requests were confirmed by a vision of God. God provides, this is true, but God is not our personal wish granting Genie. All things are given according to God's will which is the best.

The Lord be with You.

In this morning's scripture, Elisha wishes to get a double portion of the Holy spirit that is inside his teacher, Elijah. And, because he sees the chariots of fire, we know that God granted Elisha's wish.

When our wishes are granted, it can seem like a dream come true. But sometimes, granted wishes come with unexpected consequences. We were raised on stories about wishes and how they can go wrong. Think of stories about magical creatures like the genie, the golem, or the fairy. Each of these magical creatures is said to be able to grant people's wishes. Often, the stories end in tragedy because people are tricked by the creature, or they do not think through all the consequences that their wishes might bring if they came true. Those Fairies and Genies can be quite tricky, after all.

You may be wondering, why I am talking about Genies this morning. That is because, many people mistake God for a cosmic genie that can grant wishes. No one who loves God would say that out loud, but without even realizing what we are doing, we often treat God like a wish granting Genie. This misunderstanding of God can lead people to lose faith or become angry with God. Clearing up this misunderstanding is very helpful so that we can keep a strong faith as we live the ups and downs of our lives. So let me attempt to clear up some confusion about how and when God does things we ask God to do for us.

It is not that God doesn't want to be good to us. We read that God wants to give us good gifts. In Matthew 7:11, Jesus says, "If you, then, though you are evil, know how

to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” The problem with this is that often, we think we know what is good, and God knows otherwise. We don’t know what is good. Only God truly knows what is good. This misunderstanding can lead people to have false hopes that God will grant whatever THEY think is good. But the scripture doesn’t say God will give God’s children what they want... it only says God will give God’s children good gifts. Gifts that GOD thinks are good. The things we wish for are often not good for us.

That is one reason why God is not our personal wish granting Genie. But some people read the Bible and they read passages that make God seem like a wish granting Genie. Psalm 37:4 says “Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” It Sounds like God wants to give us whatever we want? Right?

But the answer is no. Unlike a person who frees a genie from a magic lamp, God is not obligated to grant our wishes. Often, we think we want something, but in reality, we don’t know what we want! This is why Therapists and Psychologists are in such demand! It takes work to truly know what our heart desires.

Furthermore, there is no way we can force God to grant our wishes. This point is especially confusing to people because we read in the Bible that Jesus teaches something that seems to say, if we pray hard enough, God will grant our wish.

Jesus teaches about how if we pray like a persistent widow seeking justice from a judge who could care less about her, we will get justice like she does. In Luke 18 we read, “And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.” It Sounds like if we are not getting our wish granted, perhaps we just need to pray harder. On the surface, this passage seems to say: Somehow, if we pray hard enough and sincere enough, we can force God to grant us our wishes. But this is not true. God says through persistent prayer he will grant us justice, not whatever we wish for. God is not our personal wish granting Genie.

Let me summarize some of the confusing ideas I have attempted to dispel about how and when God grants our wishes. **First**, God does want to give us good gifts. But, unlike a Genie who doesn’t care about us, God loves us enough to be choosy about which of our wishes he grants. **Second**, God wants to grant the desires of our hearts. Unfortunately, we often are unaware of what our heart really desires. And **third**, God wants us to consistently pray, but we can’t force God to grant a wish of ours by praying more or getting more people to pray. God grants wishes that God knows are in our best interest.

I often say at the beginning of worship, God is good: all the time. This is true, and so God’s plan is the gold standard of what is good for us and everyone else. This is

why we pray over and over again, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, when we pray the Lord's Model Prayer! God grants our wishes that are in line with whatever God is planning.

If we can truly accept that, we can avoid confusion and dashed expectations that can cause us to lose our faith in God. I see the false idea that God is some kind of wish granting Genie pushing people away from God.

I have had many people tell me that they lost faith in God because God allowed something bad to happen to them that specifically went against what they were praying for. One of the clearest examples of this is when a child dies before their parent does. This is one of the very worst things I can think of that can happen to a person. And I have spoken to many parents who lost a child who feel like God has slighted them. I have heard things said like, "I prayed so hard for the cancer to go away. We had all our prayer warriors praying night and day. And God did not listen."

I don't believe that is true. I believe God does listen. Sometimes God's plan requires greater sacrifice than we can understand. If we are careful what we wish for when we pray, we can set our expectations in line with God's will. When we expect God to do whatever God thinks is best, we are not as likely to feel slighted by God. Do not misunderstand me here, though. I am in no way attempting to minimize the pain of a grieving parent. It is real and it is sad and it is hard. What I am saying is that if we expect that God will not always grant our wishes, our faith can endure the difficult season of grief.

Another time when confusion about how and when God grants our wishes can cause people to lose faith in God is when God seems to refuse our requests for a sign when we need one. I have also had people point out the places in scripture where God does miracles for people and gives them signs. For example, Gideon asked God for a sign to make sure he was doing God's will, and God granted his wish. In our scripture this morning, Elisha wished for a double portion of God's Spirit that was in Elijah, and God granted Elisha's wish, confirming it with a sign of chariots of fire. Peter, James, and John got to witness many signs that Jesus was Lord and Savior, perhaps the greatest of these is when Jesus was transfigured before them on the mountain.

For those of us who believe in and love God, we often wish we could just be SURE of what God wants us to do. I have prayed with many people for God to make what he wants people to do plain and obvious. People want a sign from God to be sure, beyond the shadow of a doubt that God is real, and that they are doing God's will.

I think this is a prayer that all believers pray, multiple times in their lives. "Lord, give me a sign!" And sometimes we get one. Often times, we do not. Why would God not grant our humble wish for a sign?

I think the answer is because God grants our wishes that are in line with whatever God is planning. God granted Elisha a double portion of God's Spirit, so that Elisha could specifically carry out the work that God wanted Elisha to do! And if Elisha knew all that God was going to ask of him, He would likely hung back with the other 50 prophets, and let someone else take over for Elijah!

Similarly, God gave Peter, James, and John, the sign of the transfiguration to increase their faith and to prepare them for the hard work that God wanted them to do.

But just because we do not receive a sign, does not mean that God is not with us. God grants wishes that go along with God's perfect plan. If we do not expect that God will give us a sign unless it is in God's specific plan to do so sets our expectations of God correctly so we do not lose faith because of our dashed hopes.

The practical take away step is that we should be careful what we wish for. Not because God is mean spirited, and looking to trick us in granting our wishes. We should be careful what we wish for so that we can set our expectations of God correctly. When our expectations of God are set correctly, we are less likely to lose faith because we feel wronged or slighted by God.

We are careful what we wish for when we always include the phrase, but your will be done, and not ours. That is how we are taught by Jesus to pray. Even Jesus himself used this formula when he wanted to avoid the ultimate suffering death on the cross for our sins. In Luke 22:42, Jesus prays, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." Even Jesus is careful what he wishes for. And if God would have granted anyone's wish it would have been Jesus's wish. But God knew it was good not to grant this wish. As a result, you and I, and everyone else have a chance to repair our broken relationship with God. God is not our personal wish granting genie, and that is a good thing. Thanks be to God!