
Divine Intervention

There is a story (perhaps true, but I cannot confirm it) of a church that was taken to court. The story goes like this: a businessman in the community had decided to open an adult entertainment store, something that outraged the Christians of that community. They gathered for prayer, asking that God intervene in some way so that store would have to close. A few days after the prayer meeting, a fault in the wiring caused a fire, and the store burned to the ground. The owner of the store took the church to court, demanding that the members of that congregation pay reparations. The congregation vehemently denied that anyone from their congregation had anything to do with the fire.

The judge listened to the two sides as they presented their cases, and after they had their say, he made the following statements. Turning to the businessman, he said, "You have testified that you do not believe that God cares what you do, and yet, you are accusing these Christians of collaborating with God in the closure of your store? How can you blame the Christians if God does not care what goes on in this world?" Turning to the Christians, he said, "You say that you believe that God intervenes in this world to answer prayer, and yet you deny having any part in the fire that destroyed the store? How can you say that when you prayed to your God and asked for his intervention?" I don't recall how the story ended, whether the church had to pay reparations or not, but I suspect that the judge dismissed the lawsuit saying that he could not make a ruling.

The judge made a good point. If people truly believe that God does not exist, they cannot blame Christians when their prayers are answered. On the other hand, if people truly believe that God exists and that he does answer our prayers, we cannot say that we had no part in what happens.

There are many people in the world who say that God does not exist (or doesn't care about our world) but when it comes down to it, they live as if he does. When difficulty strikes, we find them seeking divine intervention. When a loved one dies, they immediately speak of that person as "being in a better place," meaning heaven, and there cannot be a heaven unless there is someone beyond us who made it. It is tremendously hard to be a true atheist because there is built in all of us a sense that we are not alone in this universe, and there is a hope that there is more to life than we see.

On the other hand, there are many who say that God does exist and live without much hope that he will intervene in their lives or in the lives of those around them. They live as if God won't answer prayer, and they feel they have to take things in their own hands first. Perhaps we are among them, first seeking all the human help we can find before turning to God in prayer. Sometimes even our prayers are not prayed with much faith.

I find myself to be in this category. A number of years ago, a man came to the Bible study I was attending. He was not a Christian although he knew what it took to become one. Although not a follower of Jesus Christ, he was convinced that God would intervene in our lives if the right person asked. He came to us and said, "I need divine intervention because my life is falling apart, and my wife has left me, and I have no hope. Please pray for me." We gathered together as members of the Bible Study, serious Christians all

of us, and as we bowed our heads to pray, I remember thinking, “But will God really answer our prayer, or is this a waste of time?” I was a little ashamed of my thoughts, but they were real.

I was even more ashamed of my lack of faith when, a few months later, this same man returned to our Bible study and joyfully proclaimed that his wife had returned and that his life was coming back to order. God had answered our prayers, even when I didn’t believe that he would. (I did believe that God could, but I think I doubted that he would.) Again, I was a little embarrassed and I was glad that I had kept my earlier doubts to myself.

I have come to appreciate the phrase that this man used to describe God acting: divine intervention. God intervening in this world. God doing real and concrete things. God at work, providing for us in wonderful ways.

I often recall this story of the man who, although he did not believe in Jesus, believed firmly that God had not forgotten us, that he wasn’t a distant, cold God. He believed in a God who saw our needs and responded to our cries for help. He believed in a God who is also our tender and loving Father and who does not turn a deaf ear or a blind eye.

I also think of the story of the members of the congregation who were reluctant to admit their part in the destruction of the immorality that had moved among them. Their denial of playing any role was not a strong testimony to their relationship with their God. They were not faithful witnesses. Of course, even if the judge had allowed the lawsuit to go forward, it would have been easy to lay the blame on the mouse who had chewed through the wiring. It would have been more difficult to explain why the store had burned shortly after the prayer meeting without admitting that God does intervene in this world and has something to say about what we do with our lives. There does seem to be some causation here and not mere correlation. That could not have been proved in the court, but at least the Christians could have talked about answered prayer and joyfully shared how they were seeing God at work.

Sometimes there is something we can learn from people who profess not to believe. We who trust God with our lives can be reminded that God does intervene in this world, and he does so to advance his purposes and bless his people. We can also be faithful witnesses to the fact that when we need divine intervention, God is ready and willing to intervene. May we be faithful witnesses to God’s intervention in this world and his grace to us in Jesus Christ, the ultimate “divine intervention” that has changed our lives forever.

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