

## In Jesus' Name We Pray

John 14:13, 14

*Bryn MacPhail / Apr. 5, 2011 (Lent Midweek Series)*

This past Sunday we examined and compared two parallel texts from the Gospel of John.

From John 14:13 we learned that when we pray *in Jesus' name*, we receive what we ask for and *God the Father is glorified*.

From John 16:24 we learned that when we pray *in Jesus' name*, we receive what we ask for and *our joy is made complete*.

Taken together, we have a very compelling motivation for prayer.

Prayer, when done rightly, is effective.

Prayer produces results.

Prayer brings glory to our Father in heaven.

Prayer completes our joy.

What we didn't talk about on Sunday was *what it means to pray in Jesus' name*.

In John, chapter 14, verses 13 and 14—where Jesus says, "**whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.**"

If praying in Jesus' name glorifies God the Father and completes our joy, it is vital that we understand precisely what it means to pray in Jesus' name.

A look at *the context* of this passage provides us with some clues. The context to praying in Jesus' name is Jesus announcing His departure to His disciples.

Jesus begins to speak of His departure in chapter 13, verse 33 by saying, "**Where I am going, you cannot come.**"

He repeats this instruction three verses later, "**Where I go, you cannot follow Me**" (13:36). Jesus goes on to say in verses 2 and 3 of chapter 14 that, "**I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again**".

*The context of Jesus' promises to His disciples is His departure from them.* The disciples, we are not surprised to read, are unsettled by this news. Both Peter and Thomas ask Jesus, "**Lord, where are You going?**" (13:36; 14:5).

The disciples had left everything to follow Jesus. They were committed to following Him. They loved Him. But now, Jesus explains to them, He has to go away.

Aware of their anxiety, Jesus begins to give them reasons to be encouraged.

The first thing Jesus does to comfort them is *He reminds the disciples of who He is*. Jesus reminds them, "**I am in the Father, and the Father in Me**" (14:11).

Because Jesus and God the Father are One, the disciples must understand that the departure of Jesus will only be temporary--"**I will come again**" (14:3) is the promise of Jesus.

The second thing Jesus does to comfort the disciples is that *He tells the disciples what they are capable of*.

"**Truly, truly**" Jesus says to them, "**greater things than these shall (you) do; because I go to the Father**" (14:12).

The disciples had witnessed the miracles of Jesus. They had, no doubt, witnessed the conversion of a great many people as a result of His teaching. And now Jesus was promising that His departure would enable the disciples to do "**greater things**" than Him.

Not greater *in kind*, but greater *in scope*.

Jesus could only heal, visit, and preach to so many people. The geographic area in which Jesus ministered was relatively small. But with the departure of Jesus, the disciples would be commissioned, empowered, and expected to take the gospel to every nation in the world (Mt.28:19).

The third thing Jesus says to His disciples is that *He promises them answered prayer*--"**whatever you ask in My name, that will I do**".

My only caution as we seek to understand these words is that we not isolate the words "**whatever**" and "**anything**" from the rest of the sentence.

Jesus does not say, "Whatever you ask for, I will give you."

Nor does He say, "I will give you anything you ask for."

No—Jesus says He will give us "**whatever we ask for in (His) name.**"

I fear that many Christians today misinterpret this instruction. Many Christians treat the phrase "in Jesus' name" as if it were some magical incantation to get whatever we want in prayer.

But can you imagine the implications if this were really the case?

If praying in Jesus' name was some magical incantation that forced God's hand, can you imagine what would be going on in heaven when we prayed?

You would have someone praying, 'God, I need you to do this thing for me...in Jesus' name', and then God would say, 'Ah, shucks, they said the magic phrase! This is going to mess up everything we are doing in the kingdom, and now we have to answer this prayer.'

Friends, prayer is not magic. And we do not get to assume the role of the Sovereign when we pray.

What then, does it mean to pray "**in Jesus' name**"?

The instruction to do something in someone's name would have been readily understood by those Jesus was speaking to.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century the people did not have telephones, email, or facebook. If you wanted to send a message to someone in a distant land you sent an ambassador—and the ambassador would go in your name.

The ambassador, also known as a herald, would be charged with saying EXACTLY what you wanted said.

*To pray in the name of Jesus then is to pray as Christ Himself would pray.*

We see this principle also in John's first epistle, chapter 5, verse 14: **"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."**

To pray in the name of Jesus means to pray for the things that Christ would pray for if He were among us in the flesh.

This understanding makes perfect sense in the context of Jesus' earthly departure.

*Just as Jesus expects His disciples to carry on His works and mission in a manner consistent to His own, so does He expect His disciples to pray in a manner consistent to His own.*

The message is clear. If we want our prayers answered, we must pray as Jesus prayed. This, of course, begs the question, "How did Jesus pray?"

*The Lord's Prayer*      – our Father's kingdom & will  
   - our physical and spiritual needs

Gethsemane              - God's will at the expense of personal preference

Jesus 'Priestly' Prayer - unity of believers  
   - protection from the evil one

Other notables:            - prayer for labourers for the harvest  
   - prayer for the Holy Spirit  
   - prayer that a person's faith won't fail (ie Peter)  
   - prayer for the Father's pardon for our enemies

When we pray in a way that is congruent with how Jesus prayed, we can be confident about receiving a positive answer.

But let's also be honest about the fact that we are well-acquainted with unanswered prayer.

We touched upon this on Sunday morning. It was admitted that not all of our prayers receive the immediate, affirmative, response that we are hoping for.

Unanswered prayer sometimes baffles us. We often can't comprehend why the Lord wouldn't want to give us what we are asking for.

The Scripture does have some things to say about unanswered prayer.

While some unanswered prayer may baffle our understanding, other occasions for unanswered prayer are readily explainable.

*One reason for unanswered prayer* that we frequently see in the Scriptures is the *hypocrisy* (or sin) of the one praying.

Isaiah 58

James 4:3 – asking with wrong or self-serving motives

1Peter 3:7 – disrespecting our wife can hinder our prayers

*A second reason why our prayers might not be answered is because they are not in our best interests or in the best interests of others.*

As finite human beings with limited perspective we sometimes ask for things that would actually be detrimental to us in the long run. In such cases, God in His grace does not answer our prayers.

C.S. Lewis went as far as to thank God for all of the unanswered prayers in his life. Lewis writes, "If God had granted all the silly prayers I've made in my life, where would I be now?"(Lewis, *Letters To Malcolm*, 28).

*A third possibility for thinking that our prayers are unanswered is that we simply lack the ability to see answered prayer.*

When God answers prayer, He often does so in a manner we wouldn't expect and with timing we wouldn't choose.

I think of the story of a lone shipwreck survivor on an uninhabited island. This man managed to build a crude hut in which he placed all that he had saved from his sinking ship. He prayed to God daily for deliverance and he anxiously watched the horizon to hail any passing ship.

One day the man was horrified to find his hut in flames. All that he had was gone. To this man's limited vision, this was the worst thing that could possibly happen. The man was so upset by this that he began to curse God.

The very next day, a ship arrived.

"How did you ever find me?", exclaimed the man.

The captain answered, "We saw your smoke signal".



Yes, this is a fictional parable, but the principle of the story is helpful: God does indeed answer prayer. Not always in a manner we would expect, and not always as quickly as we would hope for, but He does answer prayer.

The key for us to experience answered prayer is to pray as Jesus Himself would pray.

Thankfully, God has revealed much of His will and so we can pray with much confidence.

We know that God wants to be glorified in every situation.

We know that God desires for the Gospel to spread.

We know that God desires His Spirit to transform individuals, congregations, and communities into the likeness of Jesus.

We know that God desires our growth in grace.

We know that God desires to manifest His strength in our times of weakness.

Pray for these things with great confidence. Pray for these things absolutely knowing that God wants these things also.

Our God is good. He is generous. And He is eager to answer our prayers when we ask in Jesus' name.