

Reading: John 14v1-14

Theme: A giant iceberg of a promise.

Many precious truths lie on the surface in John's gospel - just as diamonds did on the surface of areas of South Africa when first explored. Yet more precious are those promises that lie out of sight, or are like icebergs with only the tip of the promise being first seen and yet it is far larger than any of us ever imagine! Often, we sail along in our what we think are our unsinkable Titanic-like problems and difficulties and we so easily rush past the promises, encouragements of God as if they were just ice cubes! The promise we begin to look at this morning is one so large that our problems, discouragements, fears and worries should be sunk without a trace and we become totally amazed at the enormity of the promise and the encouragements it gives us.

Here is a promise so large that our discouragements should be smashed to pieces as they come up against it. Sadly, we take a course which avoids and circumnavigates blessed collisions with this promise. God's promises are destructive to despair, to our feeling of our problems being unsinkable, yet the promises of God remain so helpful and necessary to our souls' well-being.

Last time, in this chapter, we started looking at the 3rd encouragement and comfort - **Christ's work will not stop even after His departure (v12-14)** and we saw this area carried within it 2 precious promises. The first being: **greater things to be done by Christians**. It is limited to Christians, would be possible only after Jesus had returned to His Father, for then the Holy Spirit would be sent and the post-Easter, post-Pentecost position of believers would be radically altered - for salvation would have been accomplished and the Holy Spirit would have come in His fullness. This pointed us on to the realisation that these greater works were in the spiritual realm primarily - gospel proclamation and success. Now we move on to the other precious promise given, which flows on from, follows on from the first and that is:

2. The Promise of answered prayer – which is also gloriously found in these 2 verses. These 2 promises are interrelated - the greater works done by Christians are organically interconnected with the fulfilment of prayer being answered. The 2 promises are necessary parts of the same encouragement which says that Christ's work will not stop after His departure and we are given insight how this will be so. I want us to note 3 things in this message:

A. How it does not apply.

I am looking at the negative aspect first, to remove false notions and ideas about this promise. Then we can come to it with a clean sheet, a clear working area and see clearly what it includes and how great it is. For it is not to be applied in a simplistic manner. Some say Jesus says that we can ask for anything in prayer and He will do it - so health, wealth, success, triumphs are all ours and Christians are those who have all, get all and have no illness, cares or worries! God becomes our celestial genie to grant us all our wants and wishes! This is not so, for prayer is more than "*saying our prayers*" and then demanding all we want and desire. We fail to realise that our God is also aboundingly good and right when our prayers are answered in the negative!

Nor are we to ask in a ritualistic way – have a list of things and include Jesus' name, or His character or blessing Him in prayer, then add "*in Jesus' Name*" = 'the phrase that pays'! Many pray like that and assume their prayers will be answered as they used the right words of incantation. Let's consider what the promise means and how we correctly apply it to our praying. See:

B. What it means to ask in Jesus' Name.

How would the disciples get the power to do greater spiritual works? It is by the Holy Spirit (v16ff) sent after Jesus' ascension, but this is linked to prayer. Incredibly, God's power is available to ones such as the disciples and us to be able to do greater things - which is

amazing! These words are a direct encouragement to the uncomplicated, great privilege and duty of prayer. Yet true prayer is not a matter of saying words, even saying our prayers with feeling and meaning them, nor of adding “*in Jesus’ name*”.

This promise brings us face-to-face with one of the greatest privileges and honours we can have, which is to be able to go not only to the Royal Courts of heaven, but to the throne at the centre of all Creation and address directly the very God of all, doing so as our heavenly Father. Amazingly Jesus says that from His throne of glory He would answer the prayers of people like you and me! Yet we have to ask, pray in Jesus name. What **is** meant by asking in Jesus name? Again, I say it is not merely tagging these words onto the end of a prayer as a magic key, pass code to get what we want. So, what is it?

Firstly, it means we are to realise that without the Lord Jesus, all He is and has accomplished for us, we have no way to God at all. We cannot go to God in prayer because of who we are, what we do or say. We are excluded, shut out from heaven, have no access, no entrance to heaven’s courts, cannot pray and our words carry no weight or significance in the throne room of heaven.

How is it then we can pray? Well, it is in Jesus’ name - not as a chant, incantation or password, but realising that by the term “Jesus’ name” we mean all He is and all He has accomplished on our behalf and in us - we ask it in accordance to all He is - His character and Being. The NT makes it clear there is no possibility of prayer or entry into God’s presence except in and through the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour. No one goes to the Father except by Him (v6). We are to realise it is not prayer on the basis of what we do or have done; nor by our feelings or goodness; not even our needs - great or small as they are. These things still exclude all of us from God’s presence.

There is no other way we can go into God’s presence except through the Lord Jesus and all He has done for us. God is light, is three times

holy, is a burning fire. Even holy angels can only barely tolerate His awesome burning holy presence. If that is the case, then dare we think that we creatures of sinful dust, who are feeble and frail, have impure lives and low thoughts of God can go to God in prayer? Or do we arrogantly think we can barge into God's presence when and as we want, and then dare to ask for things?

Those who are simplistic and ritualistic in their approach to God, assume this holy, majestic eternal God, can be satisfied with our deeds, or password and incantation. Yet it is not so. Consider some of the OT people who encountered God – Isaiah – he is devastated in the felt and seen presence of the holy God in a vision; Ezekiel felt the same, as did Daniel and Job. Would anyone of us dare to go before this holy God in our natural state? Even those who are Christians and trying to live holy, God pleasing lives, would we arrogantly dare to try and enter heaven in our own merits and say we deserve to be heard and answered?

If we do not feel fit to approach God in prayer, how much more does God know we are not fit to approach do so! So how can we boldly go to the throne of grace as we are told in the Hebrews 4:16? How can we have boldness, access and confidence in prayer as Ephesians 3:12 says? Queen Esther feared to go into her husband's royal throne room in case she was executed as no one was allowed to go the king unless invited or he held out his golden sceptre. How will we know we are accepted to gain entrance to God?

There is only one way, by going in Jesus' name, by having all Jesus is and all He has done as our own personal possession. This means we have to have Him as our Saviour and this begins with us not standing upon, or parading what we have done. We are to grasp we have nothing to commend us toward God, also realise we have everything that deserves God's condemnation and punishment. We recognise we have fallen short of His glory; our best deeds are filthy sins against Him. Yet the Lord Jesus came as our sin bearer, our

personal sin bearer for our own sin and He took our guilt and punishment upon Himself there on Calvary. Not only so, but when we believe on Him, not only is our guilt removed, but His perfect purity, His righteousness is eternally and legally given and credited to us (justification). Then we are no longer seen as beggars in the filthy rags of our righteousness and sin, but we are now given the robe of His perfect righteousness.

The Lord Jesus prepared that robe for us and has given it to us for ever. When we are in Him, we are accepted just as He is accepted; valued as He is valued; seen as He is seen; loved as He is loved. He can approach God the Father and because of Him, so can we - because we are in Him.

To ask in Jesus' name is firstly to pray because we are a Christian. That means we can pray no matter how low and rubbish we feel. It doesn't matter how we feel at all; we don't need to use some magic formula or a right form of words; or feel that we have been good enough to deserve to be heard; or that we can pray long enough to get an answer! To pray in Jesus' name is to let go of, forsake all we are and have and rely exclusively on divine resources as we trust only in what Jesus has eternally done for our souls.

I had hoped to move on to see His name = His character and Being for us to better be able to grasp how these affect our understanding of the term "anything" = yes, go in prayer because of all He has done for us, but praying in His name also means asking **in line with, in accordance with His character and being** - praying for God's holy will to be done. We will go on to look at this next time. Before I finish, let's see one more thing:

C. Some practical applications.

Let's begin to apply what we have seen so far and start to work these things out in our praying, in the nitty-gritty reality of our daily lives,

our struggles, triumphs, heartaches and rejoicing as we come to God in prayer.

In Ephesians 3:12 Paul writes *“In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.”* (NIV); *“In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him.”* (AV) We are to realise we can go boldly, with freedom and confidence to God in prayer for we have access. This God of majestic, eternal holiness, can be approached because, and only because, we have faith in Jesus Christ – as all He is and has done is ours and we are accepted in Him. These are the real and great privileges and honours we have in prayer. There are no barriers up, no legal bans, no fear of *“trespassers will be prosecuted”* for the gospel declares to us that *“trespassers will be forgiven, welcomed and have access!”*

Prayer is not relax, let your mind go blank. Nor is it rushing into God’s presence and saying any old thing. Prayer can be hard work and needs to be approached correctly. Yes, we go confidently, boldly, with freedom, but never flippantly or chummily. God is still God, even though He is our heavenly Father. Yet, He is the Father who loves us, not a tyrant to be appeased. The devil sends us to either extreme as we approach God in prayer.

We need to deal with our feelings, as often we personally, do not feel worthy to pray and so we do not pray. At that point we should talk to ourselves, preach to ourselves, recollect gospel truths as we go in prayer and tell ourselves and the devil (*who will remind us that we have no right to pray to this holy God and that we are a hypocrite*) - while such accusations are right, we then remind ourselves and the devil of what Christ has done for our soul and it will shut the devil up and also answer our feelings of unworthiness - because we can go in Christ and we will be praising God before we know it.

As we begin to pray, we are to remind herself of who God is and is to us - "*Our Father who art in heaven*" - we are to remember our God, His nature and how we can approach Him. Yes, sin and coldness will be exposed, but we will be again brought to Christ and we will be able to thank Him for His forgiveness, mercy, help and love as well as the access, boldness and confidence we have in prayer. In owning our sin and coldness, we will also see our need of God's ongoing help by His Spirit and that He has promised Him also (14:16) and so were able to thank Him for such a promise and help.

Having done that, having come thankfully in Jesus' name, what are we going to pray about? By now things should be in context, in focus and there will be no rushing into God's presence, a shopping list poured out, adding "*in Jesus' name*" and then off. Yes, sometimes we have to pray these emergency type prayers, but they are to be exceptions rather than the rule and even such arrow prayers are in the setting of all Jesus has done for us.

To pray in Jesus' name means we can come only to God as a believer in the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and we boast, claim nothing for ourselves and it is to affect our prayer life and practice of prayer.

A question I have been asked a number of times is "*Is it right to end or include in our prayers 'We/I ask this in Jesus' name'?*" We never read in NT of any prayers ending with '*We/I ask this in Jesus' name*'. As we realise that true prayer is only possible for those who have a relationship with God through the Lord Jesus as their Saviour, so we do not have to say it, but it is **permissible to do so**, as long as it is said aware of what we mean and is not a mere repetition of a phrase used unthinkingly. Some people pray and they will use Jesus' names, titles and suchlike frequently as if the more they use these, the more likely their prayers are to be heard and answered! It can become mindless repetition and that is the thing we are to avoid. I know we all get into using favourite words and phrases, especially in public prayer. I do not want to hinder anyone in their prayer life as we can

become very self-conscious about praying in public. Praying in private is another matter as we are not leading people in prayer, but coming to our heavenly Father who knows us perfectly anyway.

We have only just begun to consider the great privilege and honour of prayer, as we start to look at the great promise of Christ here concerning prayer and answered prayer.

Here in these verses we have a massive iceberg of a promise, privilege and encouragement which is big enough to sink 10,000 Titanics of our fears and worries. Isaac Watts asks in one of his hymns “*Why should the children of the King, go mourning all their days?*” Realise the devil would keep us earthbound, but our Saviour wants us to mount up with wings as eagles. I would encourage us all to pray with warmth, thankfulness and awe - to take hold on this promise and wrestle it to the ground - until it conquers us; and although we may be crippled to self-worth, go away limping to self, but we will cling onto Him who spoke such a promise for our own blessing, benefit and encouragement.