

Reading: John 14:1-14

Theme: Prayers in Jesus' name are answered.

I read an account of a Scottish minister in Scotland in the mid-1800s who was visiting an old lady who lived in a small cottage and her living conditions, even then, were poor and she struggled to survive. She spoke of her life, of her service for some nearly 60 years to a local Lord and Lady and their family. She owned she was disappointed not to be provided for on her retirement. All they gave her was a piece of paper, a thank you note, or a long service certificate of some kind. She grumbled about it and then got it out of the drawer to show the minister. It was not what she thought, it was a banker's draft for a very large amount, but she was unable to read and had no idea what it was and it kept it safe only to grumble over it as she struggled on!

God's promises are meant to be drawn on to enable us to live our lives aright and not to struggle on in a poverty-stricken way. Thankfully, there are many promises to encourage us in this chapter of John. Last time we saw the 3rd area of encouragement in v12-14 - that **Jesus' work will not stop after His departure**. The 2nd promise in v13-14 is the **promise of answered prayer**.

Last time we saw **1. How it does not apply** - not in a simplistic or ritualistic way, just using Jesus' name as an incantation or password to make our prayers legitimate and genuine. We saw **2. What it means to ask in Jesus name** - we can only pray and go to God in prayer through all Jesus is and all He has accomplished for us and in us. We cannot pray truly if we are not a Christian and even then, we go to God in prayer not because of anything in us, but all because of who Jesus is and what has done. I tried briefly to **apply** this and how it should affect our praying - we have no confidence in ourselves to go to

God, but pray because of who Jesus is. We do not pray through or to anyone else, but we go directly to God with boldness and confidence. We may not feel worthy, but we pray because of Jesus and all He's done for us.

We are still in this area of what it means to ask in Jesus' name and it means **we pray in agreement with all He is in His being in character**. We pray through all Jesus has done for and in us; this allows us to ask in His name, for as we come to God in prayer, we are clothed with Jesus' perfectness, His righteousness on us, so we are accepted and welcomed in Him. This means **we are to pray as He would pray**. Our prayers are to be in agreement with His character, being, personality, all He is and desires.

While at university one of our friends was a most earnest vegetarian and would give us as a group earache about eating meat! We had this for 2 terms and in the 3rd term she mentioned that she and her family had gone out for a meal over Easter and she had a really delicious steak! She was a vegetarian - who could not resist a rump steak! It was weird, out of keeping and character!

Often Christians can be out of character in our praying. We are new creations in the Lord Jesus, love Him because He first loved us; own His Lordship, all He's done for us, say we want His will for our life, we want to be more Christ-like and wholly - all true and right desires and all to be true of Christians, yet in prayer we then go out of character and pray for, demand things that we know are right or even know are not good and therefore wrong! In his letter James says we can pray from wrong desires and motives within us and it cause quarrelling and fighting as we can pray for things for our own pleasures (4:1-3). This is not

asking in Jesus' name. We can pray self-indulgent, covetous, greedy, self-centred and biased so-called "prayers"! This is not praying in Jesus' name - even if we say the phrase we think pays!

As we come to prayer in our lives, we are to consider what Jesus is like and what we know of Him from the word of God - God incarnate, powerful, holy, loving, caring, wise, all knowing, everywhere in all He is at the same time, God the Father glorifying and Jesus is sinless and pure - they are just a few things of what He's like. To ask in His name is ask for things which will be in agreement with who He is in His character and Being. As a rule of thumb, as we pray or consider a thing to pray for, we should ask our self if we could really and truly imagine the Lord Jesus asking for this. I once heard of someone giving as an excuse for their adultery that they prayed about it and they had peace! Apply this rule of thumb to that - would Jesus have prayed like it!? To ask in Jesus' name is to ask in all Jesus is, has done for and in us, to ask in line, in keeping with all He is in character and being. Now we see:

3. Asking in Jesus' name affects the words "whatever" and "anything".

When we pray, we are not told we can ask for whatever we want, desire, lust after, nor for anything whatsoever it is. Those who pray simplistically focus on the words "*whatever you ask*" and "*ask anything*". Look again! The Lord Jesus says "*whatever you ask **in my name**... ask anything **in my name**...*" There are safeguards, boundaries put on this extraordinary unrestricted promise of prayer. We may question and think it is not unlimited, because there are things we cannot **rightly ask for**. That is exactly it - **ask rightly**.

Imagine we said to our children - they could have anything they wanted up to a limit of £X. Would we really mean anything? It wouldn't include narcotic drugs, poisonous snakes, a criminal substance or an illegal product; I doubt it would include anything harmful to them or others. When we said "anything" we intended it to be anything good, of benefit, at least harmless and certainly in line with the way and moral standards we brought them up in. In the same way, the words "whatever" and "anything" are governed by the phrase "in my name". Jesus is saying all that is consistent with who He is, what He has done, what He is doing and will do, what He is like.

Within that is a vast scope for praying - everything consistent with His glory and the eternal well-being of ourselves and others. This shifts the emphasis from what we want, desire or imagine we need or lust after, onto that which is truly right and good for us to pray for. We may have prayed for things desperately, as we feel we need it and our hearts are set on such. Yet our Lord in His wise, loving and holy care has not let us have such things, as He knows such things would not be beneficial for us - in the short or long-term. We in our limited understanding and sin affected desires can so easily ask for things for the wrong reasons - pride, lust, greed, for appearance sake. We can be very thankful our God does not judge us by sending us our every desire - He did with the stubborn people of Israel - as we read of in Psalm 106:15 (AV) "*And He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.*"

There are many things we can rightly pray for. We are able to pray for our bodily needs – food, health, strength, finances, jobs, relationships. It is how we pray that is important - we ask in Jesus' name, asking for what He wants and as He knows is best. This means we are to submit to His will and to pull on Him in

prayer so that our will is brought to His will. None of us would want ill-health, but do we pray for our lives to glorify God in whatever situation we are in? What if that included ill-health for us? Are we still willing to pray that prayer? Yes, it is right to pray healing for ourselves and others, but we cannot demand it as we pray for His will to be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Our Saviour Himself prayed the evening before His death and suffering - for the cup of suffering to be removed from Him, but He submitted to the will of God the Father and did so to glorify Him.

In praying in Jesus name, we ask for God's will be done in our lives and this ultimately affects the words "whatever" and "anything". It is so that the Son can bring glory to the Father through us. We are asking for things in all that Jesus is, has done, according to His character and being, for Him to bring glory to His and our Father. In the Lord's prayer those are the first areas we pray for – hallowed be our Father's name, His kingdom come, His will to be done – all on earth as in Heaven. Then and only then, do we begin with our needs in the light of those 3 primary petitions – wanting His will for our lives.

I do not want us to get uptight, confused and concerned about our praying –that's not my aim, but may be a consequence of this message! I want us to think correctly about this great honour of prayer and not pray as those James mentions – as we saw earlier, but we are to copy, be learners of the Lord Jesus.

There are practical out workings of these things – we are to be as Christlike as we can be. God does not necessarily bless talents, minds and abilities alone. God blesses and uses those who are most godly and Christlike, who show their great love for Him by being like Him in word, deed and thought.

To ask in Christ's name means knowing what He is like, what pleases Him and we dare not approach Him while clinging onto known sin. Yes, we will still sin, will even carry sin with us in prayer into God's presence - that is why we come in Jesus' name as even our daily defilements are dealt with, but we are to take notice of God's word in Psalm 66:18 *"If I had **cherished** sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;"* how can we go in prayer if we cherish, delight in sin in our heart? Yes, we may go aware of our sins, our failings, but not cherishing them; we may go and even be afraid we will be drawn to such sin again as we hate it, but we cannot go in prayer if we cherish sin in our hearts.

We are to pray lifting up holy hands - not just literally, but figuratively with no known cherished sin of deeds, desires or thoughts in our heart; we are to ascend the holy hill of God with no bitterness and hatred of others going there with us. There is to be a confessing, forsaking of sin, even our sinful desires and we can tell our Father of these desires and how they grieve us and know that they must grieve Him. That is why we cannot go in bitterness or resentment in our hearts and minds - we are to leave off praying and sort it out. We cannot imagine Jesus praying and yet having bitterness and resentment against someone!

We are to examine our motives honestly before God and His word. Are we seeking His glory really and truly? Even if we are convinced, we are, we are still to mean and pray *"Your will be done"*. We may find we pray for our own selfish ends; if so we are to own it and ask for His help to love what He loves.

My old pastor, Mr Lewis, used to say that we are to keep short accounts with God and so we need to be conscious of that in

prayer as we maintain a relationship with no barriers up between us and God. If we treat sin as something light and insignificant, we will easily confess it and yet not easily forsake it! Sometimes in our lives, the Lord allows us to feel the awfulness of our sin so as to break our hearts and wean us from it, it's grip and to learn to fear its approach in future times. There are many other areas we could touch upon in our practical out workings, but we must move on and see:

4. The Lord Jesus Himself answers such prayers.

Prayers offered in this way shall be heard. Realise Jesus says something amazing to the people of His day as He doesn't say that Jehovah, the Lord, the Father will answer such prayers, but speaks of He, Himself answering those prayers personally - "*I will do... I will do it*" (v13-14). Incredibly, the One who answers the prayers of His people is the Lord Jesus Himself. As we pray in Jesus' name, all in harmony with who He is, what He has done, as we see God's glory as the motive for a praying, so we discover the Hearer and Answerer of prayer is our Lord and Saviour Himself.

His work will continue after His departure because He will still be working - enabling His people to do greater works than He did while on earth - in the spiritual realm, gospel works; He will be working through and in them and answering their prayers. In His post-Easter, ascended and post-Pentecost office, He is the mediator for His people and this role extends to the answering of the prayers of His people as these are offered in all His name stands for as that includes, of necessity, bringing glory to the Father.

This means we can come with boldness, confidence, knowing we have access to God. Prayer is such a huge area of importance

in the Christian life; is such an important area to develop and nurture personally. My desire has been to encourage us to realise the privilege and honour we have in prayer and to be those who would be often in prayer for our Lord's glory and honour.

He knows and understands our weaknesses and failings even in prayer. He accommodates Himself to our weakness, our learning of Him and His ways. Yes, we are to make progress in prayer. It will not do to be praying as a new baby Christian when we have been a Christian for many years. We are to develop, make progress. Thankfully, our Lord does not despise or put down our praying, for He delights to hear us pray. Over the past two messages from this passage, I've tried to cause us to think, to lay before us principles we can develop in our own praying. I hope and pray I have not hindered anyone from praying as I have overcomplicated things.

If we are a child of God through believing in the Lord Jesus, then speak to our Heavenly Father often and ask, as did the disciples, that our Saviour Jesus would also teach us how to pray. Our Saviour is so good and gentle that He will do that for us with delight.