
And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. John 14:13

How Jesus Loves: Answering Prayer

Happy Mother's Day to our earthly as well as our spiritual moms. I look out in this room and see so many ladies who have loved on their own children, as well as so many who have loved on the children that God has brought into our church family. Thank you for your ministry among us.

Last week in our series in the Upper Room Discourse, we considered an amazing and challenging promise. Jesus tells his disciples about the "greater things" they will do, and by extension, what we as the church will do. Greater things than he had done and we saw that what he was talking about was that while he purchased our salvation and lived out the good news of the Kingdom of God in the very small section of the Earth where he walked, his intention was that the healing and saving gospel of Christ would go out throughout all the world, and that would happen as we His people in the power of the Spirit, take the gospel to every nation.

This morning, we are blessed as well as challenged with a promise that is no less startling and no less powerful. We read it as we continue in John chapter 14. Let's begin though with John 14:12, "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth.

You may ask for anything in my name, and I will do it. This promise is preceded by these words. *I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.* In approaching this passage I dug into the nuances of the Greek language and the shades of meaning to help us. And I can tell you that when he says *you may ask*, that means *you may ask*. And when he says *anything* that means *anything*. And when he says *in my name*, that actually means *in my name*. And when Jesus says *I will do it*, he is literally saying *He will do it*. There are no tricks here, no surprises. Jesus says in very plain language what he intends for us to understand. But as we look at it, we think, *I don't get it, I've asked for things and they haven't happened.*

What does Jesus mean? Let's talk first about what He doesn't mean. He does not mean you can get whatever you want; that all you have to do is follow a magic formula and the great vending machine will issue whatever it is that you asked for. This is not what Jesus is talking about. We know this theologically because we understand that not all the things we ask for should happen. And we know this experientially because we've prayed desperately and have not received answers. So, no, Jesus does not mean we get anything we want. He also does not mean that if we pray and we don't get the answer we wanted, there must be something wrong with us. Nor does it mean our faith is too weak or that we have in some way closed God's ears to our prayers.

We find in scripture, many examples of people praying and not receiving what they asked for. The Apostle Paul is known throughout the Christian church as one of the greatest believers who has ever lived. He is the author of much of the New Testament. It is from him that we most clearly understand the gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ. Paul had a prayer.

Paul was at a spiritual mountaintop. He had spiritual experiences that clearly demonstrate the intimacy of his relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet in the middle of that spiritual mountaintop, he says, "Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me three times. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'" (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

The Apostle Paul prayed in Jesus' name for something to happen, and it didn't happen. But then he tells us this served for his greater joy. Paul is able to boast all the more in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ through this weakness He is experiencing.

An even more powerful example is seen in the life of Jesus. Jesus is talking here in the upper room with His disciples, and within a few hours, He will be in Gethsemane. He will be arrested there, precipitating all the events of his torture, crucifixion, and terrible death on our behalf. As he prays in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Gospel of Luke describes it this way, "He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.' An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him."

The author of Hebrews says he prayed and pleaded. "And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground." And God, the Father said, "No, this cup will not be removed from you." And Jesus went to the cross for our sake. This wonderful promise then, does not mean we will get whatever we want, and it does not mean that if we don't see the answer we anticipate or hope for, that we have somehow fallen short or necessarily displeased the Father. It does not mean He does not hear our prayers, or that our faith is necessarily weak. There is more going on here in John 14. Using the idea of a key is

helpful. When you slip a key into a lock, the click you hear is the tumblers falling into place to unlock and open the door. There are four “tumblers” to help us to unlock this passage.

Context is King.

You have heard that phrase from this pulpit, an inductive Bible study, or really any level of training in understanding the scriptures. Context considers what comes before and after, and even more broadly, the larger section of Scripture in which a phrase, promise, or admonition is contained. Context also refers to the culture and the time period in which any word is spoken. This promise is given within a context. It is an error to go to scripture and take any particular command or promise and rip it from its context and say, “This is what I believe.”

Last week we talked about the context of this passage. The context of this promise that Jesus gives is the promise immediately preceded by the declaration that the disciples would carry out his mission. We saw that by the end of their lifetime, thousands and thousands of people throughout the world came to faith in Jesus Christ as they lived out Christ's mission through the power of the Spirit.

Jesus is talking to people whom he is sending on a mission and saying, “As you are living out this mission, you may ask for anything in my name and I will do it.” We also see another part of this promise, when Jesus says, “When I go to the Father, I will send the Holy Spirit.” We know from Jesus' teaching that we can ask, and the Father will answer. And Jesus gives the example, “You parents know how to give good gifts to your children. How much more will your Father not give the Holy Spirit to anyone who asks?”

The primary answer to our prayer as we carry out God's mission is the indwelling and infilling of the Holy Spirit enabling us to do everything that God asks for life and for Godliness. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit, enabling us to carry out Christ's mission, and enabling us to live in a way that honors and pleases him. This is one of the things I love about being part of the Alliance. The first core value of the Alliance is that prayer is the primary work of God's people. Jesus is sending us out to do his works, preceded by and undergirded by, and carried through with prayer.

Pray in His Name.

Praying in Jesus' name is an astounding privilege. “In Jesus' name, Amen.” doesn't simply mean it's time to eat. It is not a formula to append a prayer. “In Jesus' name,” expresses the incredible privilege of prayer. Really think about this. When we pray, we are being bold enough as little insignificant human beings to bust into the presence of the Holy God who is the Creator of all of the universe, and to lay before him our requests. We have no right to do that. There's no basis on which we, sinful creatures should be able to go into the presence of the living God except that Jesus purchased that right for us on the cross when He took our sins upon himself and bore the wrath of God in our place. Jesus opened the way for us to go boldly into the presence of the

Father. That's why we pray "In Jesus' name." We are acknowledging that prayer is not about us or what we deserve. Prayer is all about Jesus and what He accomplished on our behalf.

Praying in agreement. Praying in Jesus' name means praying in agreement with his character and person. I'm not praying about me, my character, my person—I am praying because of who Jesus is and therefore I am praying in agreement with who Jesus is.

We see this clearly in John 15:7, Jesus talks about prayer several times in the upper room and gives this promise in different forms. In each of them, he mentions praying *in His name*. But in John 15 He describes what that means. Praying in Jesus' name means remaining in him, abiding in Him. That his presence and his nature are our spiritual home. We are rooted in him and feeding on him with his life flowing through us. "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you can ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you." "Rooted in" means that our prayer is in agreement with who he is and what he has to say.

We're not talking about self-centered praying or praying for our purposes, imagining that we have some sort of claim upon God. One commentator said that our prayer "so often reflects our failure to understand that sacred phrase, *in Jesus' name*."

Praying for His Sake. Praying in his name means praying in agreement with his character and with his purposes. And this leads us even deeper into this phrase. And that is that we are praying for his sake. We are praying for what he desires and what he has purposed to accomplish.

Pray for the Father's Glory.

That's the third tumbler in this passage. Jesus says it right there. "You may ask in my name, and I will do it so that the Father will be glorified. The things that Jesus accomplishes through our praying are the things that will bring the Father, not ourselves. In fact, Jesus will only do the things that will bring glory to the Father. "I will do it so that the Father will be glorified." James describes this dynamic in our praying very well when writing to the churches about unanswered prayer. And in James 4:2 "You do not have because you do not ask God. And when you ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." How much of our prayer is wrapped around what we believe will bring us the greatest pleasure, satisfaction, and glory on this earth? And Jesus isn't really interested in those things. He's interested in what brings glory to the Father.

Let's talk about context again. In the book of John, what brings glory to the Father? First, the cross. Jesus says that the name of the Father will be glorified as He goes to the cross and suffers terribly to purchase our salvation. That's why Jesus prays the way he does and receives the answer that will bring the Father the most glory.

In the Gospel of John, the death of Lazarus brings glory to God. Reading further, we see that bearing much spiritual fruit brings glory to God. We've mentioned that accomplishing the Father's work brings him glory. What about Peter's martyrdom? "Peter, you're going to die in the name of Jesus because it will bring the Father glory." Perhaps this promise isn't as much fun as we were hoping.

Jesus Answers Prayer for Our Joy.

The fourth tumbler brings us good news. Jesus answers prayer for our joy. John 16:23. Jesus continues. "Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."

We need to think about ultimate joy. We need to think about what, in the end, will bring us the greatest satisfaction and greatest joy. And that is the presence of Jesus Christ and eternity in ever-increasing pleasure at His right hand. Jesus is talking about eternal things, and He answers prayer for our eternal joy. It doesn't always look like the things that we think might bring us joy here and now, but what is ultimately good and brings us delight in his presence.

I'm reminded of the psalmist, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." This is praying that involves that dynamic. Sometimes the desires of our hearts do not flow out of our delight in the Lord. But as we pray, He can transform the things in which we delight so that they reflect his desires. And as we increasingly delight ourselves in the Lord, he increasingly is able to give us the desires of our heart, leading to ever-increasing joy in our praying.

These four tumblers will help us unlock this passage as we live in mission. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray in alignment with the person and the purpose of Jesus Christ. He answers in a way that brings God the greatest glory and serves for our ultimate joy.

Let's look at how that dynamic played out in the Garden of Gethsemane. Here is Jesus, pleading before the Father, "Take this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done." The key is that Jesus is praying according to the will of the Father. And while God said, "No, this cup will not be removed from you." God also said, "Yes, you will be saved from death." He raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him to ultimate glory at the right hand of the Father.

The author of Hebrews says that Jesus is our example because he endured the cross, scorning its shame for the joy set before him. It was the Father's will that Jesus suffer so that he might ultimately experience greater joy. This can be true in our praying as well. Living on mission by the power of the spirit, praying in alignment with the person and the purposes of Jesus Christ, He answers in a way that brings God the greatest glory and serves for our ultimate joy.

How Can We Pray This Way?

Pray in the Spirit. Submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit as we pray. Scripture says that sometimes we come to the end of our praying. We don't even know what to say, (Romans 8). In those moments, the Holy Spirit undertakes within us, and he, who knows our hearts, also knows the mind of the Father and prays in accordance with the will of the Father. Sometimes prayer involves being silent and saying, "God, I don't understand. I don't know what you are accomplishing in this moment, but I submit myself to you." The Holy Spirit is praying and groans what words cannot express. So, when you pray, say, "God, enable me to pray in the wisdom and the power of the Holy Spirit."

Ask for what you want. Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. Turn that around. If I am delighting in the Lord, then my desires are okay. If I delight in the Lord, I'm going to pray about what I want. I can pray for what I desire.

I often think of the blind man crying by the side of the road as Jesus is going up to Jerusalem, "Son of David, have mercy on me." And Jesus says, "What do you want?" Jesus doesn't pull him aside and say, "What's going to bring God the greatest glory in this situation?" No, he says simply, "What do you want?" We are God's children. We can go into his presence and we can say what we want. We can lay out our requests before him. Shamelessly. Boldly.

Back it up with Scripture. Do not simply pray whatever comes to mind. Pray the prayers that God has laid out for us. In the baby dedication this morning, one of our families offered Ephesians 3:18 as a prayer, "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." I love this verse! This is my prayer for our church family.

Prayer is a transformational process, aligning us with God's will and purposes for what will bring Him the greatest glory and us the greatest joy. Several years ago a very dear friend was deathly ill. I prayed for healing, pleading over and over. I remember praying, "God, how glorious it would be for your name if this person were healed." And it wasn't a scripture, It was a hymn that came to mind—

"O that will be glory for me,
Glory for me, glory for me;
When by His grace I shall look at His face,
That will be glory, be glory for me."

Here in my prayer, I was defining what brings God the greatest glory. And He said to me, "You do not know what is going to bring the greatest glory in this particular situation. Pray for my will to be done." I didn't stop praying for healing, but my prayer grew, "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

Cast your burdens on him. Allow him to bring other Scripture or truth to mind. So often our praying is characterized by the desperation of our own burden. Jesus says, "Pray freely, cast

your cares on me. I care about what is breaking your heart. Pray freely as you cast your burdens on him.

Persist in praying. Jesus gives the example of the widow who prayed over and over until she got her answer. We can do that continually; bringing before the Father our requests.

Articulate, "Your will be done." This is the most significant element. This is the hard test. This is actually a test of idolatry. Are we lifting up the things that we imagine bring God the most glory? Or are we saying, "I am submitted to whatever you will do for your glory?"

I recommend the book, *Five Things to Pray*. There is a whole series of "five things to pray" for various situations. This particular one is *Five Things to Pray for Your Kids*. This is a great one for today, Mother's Day. Let me encourage you to get it and to use it as you pray scripturally in Jesus' name, meaning for his purposes, waiting upon God to bring Himself ultimate glory and our ultimate joy is an amazing thing. The promise is true. Our praying cannot fail. Either we will get the things we ask for or we will get what is so much better and more glorious and brings us greater joy. Let's pray together now.

Thank you, Father, for this glorious promise. We know what we want and what we imagine is best. Sometimes we can't understand why the answer is no. We believe we are praying for things that are right and holy. We trust you, Lord, that your will is glorious and that your will sometimes at the far end of a long road, brings us perfect joy. And so we pray, In Jesus' name. Amen.

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