

SOME THINGS WE NEED TO KNOW - 2

"Ask - In Jesus' Name!"

John 16:24

January 29, 2012

PLANT THE SEED: Drama - "Prayer - Finding the Words"

INTRODUCTION:

There's a story about an auto dealer who was facing bankruptcy. He was walking along a beach when he kicked a bottle and out popped a genie. "Thanks for setting me free," said the genie. "To show my appreciation, I'll grant you one wish." "Okay," said the auto dealer, "I want to be the only foreign car dealer in a major metropolitan market." "Done!" cried the genie. Immediately, the dealer found himself in a glass-walled office looking out over a major city. "Quick," he said to his secretary, "tell me who I am." "You're the only Cadillac dealer in downtown Tokyo," said the secretary.

Or as I saw one teenager's view of prayer: **"God answers prayer four ways: yes, no, wait awhile, or, you've got to be kidding!"**

Today we are going to look at another life verse that will help us to live out the kind of faith that God wants us to live. How many times do we feel all alone in our quest to live for Jesus? How many times have we lifted up some kind of prayer to God only to seemingly to have it go unanswered? I remember several occasions when I had uttered a prayer in the direction of God only to feel that it was not heard. That left me feeling empty and confused. Have you ever had that experience? Aren't we told to pray to God all the time?

1 Thessalonians 5:17 tells us to pray without ceasing. Why would we be told to do that if it makes no difference? Is God messing with our minds? Today we are going to look at a passage in which Jesus encourages His followers to do something. If we are going to live the life that God wants us to live, we **MUST** realize that we have a wonderful gift that God has given to us.

Today we are going to look at what Jesus promises to us as we look at John 16:24. It is my prayer that you will take the time this week to memorize this simple passage, that you will let it penetrate the depths of your soul! Let's turn to John 16:24:

Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. ---John 16:24

In this passage, Jesus is getting near the end of His time on earth. He has told the twelve disciples that He was going to die and be raised. The disciples are a little confused, and so Jesus comforts them. Jesus explained to the disciples that his departure would only last "a little while" (actually only three days), for he would see them again on the day of his resurrection. Then a new relationship between the disciples and Jesus' Father would begin. They would then be able to approach God the Father as his children and bring to him their requests through prayer. (Life Application Bible)

Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full. ---John 16:24 (NASB)

As we look at this verse, the first thing I want us to see is that there is a problem.

I. THE PROBLEM.

As we look at verse 24, the problem that we see is the fact that the disciples had not been praying for things in the name of Jesus. Jesus is not rebuking the disciples for this problem because they had not been taught to pray in that manner. When you think back to the model prayer found in Matthew 6:5-15, Jesus does not tell them to pray in His name, He tells them to pray to the Father who is in heaven. He tells them that until now (the time before the resurrection) they had not prayed in His name, but AFTER the resurrection they would be able to pray to Jesus.

The issue we have to understand is what does Jesus mean when He tells us to pray in His name? Is praying in the name of Jesus simply an exercise of reciting your list of things you want God to do, and then at the end, say, "In Jesus name I pray"?

If we do not understand what it means to pray in the name of Jesus, or to ask in His name, we could end up not having a lot of faith in the power of prayer. The answer to this question is pretty easy once you think about it. To pray in the name of Jesus means that we are to pray for the things that Jesus would want us to pray for. If you're asking for things from a selfish motive, forget it. When we pray in Jesus' name, we're basically saying that we believe the request is something Jesus would endorse.

This thought is similar to the situation of an ambassador. When we send an ambassador to another country in the name of the United States, we expect them to represent the values and wishes of the United States. When we pray in the name of Jesus, we are supposed to represent what He wants. I wonder how many prayers go seemingly unanswered because what we are praying for is not within the will and character of our Lord.

Oh, God, please let me win the lottery! God did not answer the prayer for me, so I guess prayer does not work.

This is how many people put prayer to the test, they will ask for something THEY want, and when THEY do not get it, they turn on God. Do you know one thing you can do in order to have a better prayer life? Get to know Jesus better.

The twelve apostles spent three years with Jesus, it took them that long to get to know Jesus in an intimate way. Even with all that time they spent with Him, at times it was still a struggle. In James 4, James speaks a bit on this subject in James 4:3:

When you pray for things, you don't get them because you want them for the wrong reason—for your own pleasure. ---James 4:3

If we do not know our Lord, then we will not know what is within His will and character. We have a great gift! Jesus clarified a new relationship between the believer and God. Previously, people approached God through priests. After Jesus' resurrection, any believer could approach God directly in Jesus' name. A new day has dawned; now all believers are priests, talking with God personally and directly (see Hebrews 10:19-23).

We approach God, not because of our own merit, but because Jesus, our great High Priest, has made us acceptable to God. When was the last time you asked God for what you really need? One of the things we need to understand about life is that it is all about JESUS!

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. ---Galatians 2:20

Once we start to grasp this thought, it will change how you live, pray, and serve. Now let us look at the second thought concerning prayer.

II. THE SOLUTION.

How can we have a fulfilling prayer life? Just ASK! Notice what Jesus says in our passage. He tells us to ask and we will receive! GREAT! I want a new car, to lose 30 pounds without working on it, I want to..., I want this..., I want to win the lottery! **BLAB IT AND GRAB IT!**

This is not what Jesus is saying, He is telling us that if we ASK in His name, we will receive. Something you will notice if you have not already noticed is that as you get to know your Lord more, what you want changes, what you want becomes more of what Jesus would want. As you grow, you get become more like Him. I believe one of the BIGGEST problems in the church is that too many of us do not know Jesus, too many of us are not becoming like Christ in our lives.

The reason for this is not that we are terrible people; it is because we do not take the time we need to take in order to know our Lord. Suffice to say, when you become more like Christ, you will not ask for things that are not important to Jesus. We have a tendency to be selfish because we do not know our Lord well enough to be like Him. Jesus tells us that if we ask in His name that we will receive. We MUST have the faith in Jesus to know He will answer us.

I read an interesting article this week in preparation for this message. It used a phrase I had not heard before: **The Christian Hedonist**. The article suggests that this verse and others like it can create a Christian Hedonist; is that bad? It asks

the question: "Are you willing to be damned for the glory of God?" That is, are you willing to surrender all joy if by this God would be more glorified? The point of the question is to hang Christian Hedonists on one horn or the other of a dilemma. If we say, no, we are not willing to be damned for the glory of God, then we seem to put our happiness above God's glory. If we say, yes, we are willing to be damned for the glory of God, then presumably we cease to be Christian Hedonists, because we have stopped pursuing joy.

But this attack on Christian Hedonism fails because the question it poses assumes two things that are not true: one about hell and the other about God. When the critic asks, "Are you willing to go to hell for the glory of God?" he fails to see that if we answer yes to this question, it means that our deepest longing is to see God glorified through our life and death. Therefore, if we had to go to hell in order for God to be glorified, hell would be the means of satisfying our deepest longing. But then hell is no longer hell. Biblically, hell means total, irreversible misery with no satisfaction at all. And so the critic's question is built on an unbiblical assumption about hell.

It is also built on an unbiblical assumption about God. The question assumes that God could damn a person who is willing to be damned for God's glory. But this is an utterly unbiblical assumption. God's righteous commitment to uphold the value of his glory means that he will also uphold those who value his glory above all things. The God of the Bible cannot damn a person who loves his glory enough to be damned. And therefore the very question, "Are you willing to be damned for the glory of God?" is an offense against the righteousness of God. It forces us to entertain a possibility which God would be unrighteous to perform. It dare not be asked because the view of hell and the view of God which it assumes are both contrary to Biblical revelation.

And besides that, Christian Hedonism is really not the enemy the critic is after. He is after people who put their interests before God's interest, and who put their happiness above God's glory. But Christian Hedonism most emphatically does not do this. To be sure, we Christian Hedonists pursue our interest and our happiness with all our might; but we have learned from the Bible that God's interest is to magnify his glory by spilling over in mercy to us. Therefore, the pursuit of our real interest and our true happiness is never above God's but always in God's. The most precious truth in the Bible is that God's greatest interest is to glorify the wealth of his grace by making sinners happy in him. When we humble ourselves like little children and put on no airs of self-sufficiency, but run happily into the joy of our Father's

embrace, the glory of his grace is magnified and the longing of our soul is satisfied. In God's wisdom and by God's grace our interest and his glory are one. Christian Hedonists are not idolaters when they pursue them both together.

There is a direct correlation between not knowing Jesus well and not asking much from him. A failure in our prayer life is generally a failure to know Jesus. A prayerless Christian is like a bus driver trying to push his bus out of a rut by himself because he doesn't know Clark Kent is on the bus. "If you knew, you would ask." A prayerless Christian is like having your room wallpapered with Outback gift certificates but always eating at Wendy's because you can't read. "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that speaks to you, you would ask -- YOU WOULD ASK!

And the implication is that those who do ask -- Christians who spend time in prayer -- do it because they see that God is a great giver and that Christ is wise and merciful and powerful beyond measure. And therefore their prayer glorifies Christ and honors his Father. **The chief end of man is to glorify God.** Therefore when we become what God created us to be we become people of prayer.

But the chief end of man is also to enjoy God forever. And that brings us back to John 16:24: **Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. ---John 16:24** Is this not an invitation to Christian Hedonism? Pursue the fullness of your joy! PRAY! From this sacred word and from experience we can draw out a simple rule: Among professing Christians prayerlessness always produces joylessness. Why? Why is it that a deep life of prayer leads to fullness of joy and a shallow life of prayerlessness produces joylessness? Jesus gives at least two reasons.

One is given in John 16:20-21. Jesus alerts the disciples that they will grieve at his death but then rejoice again at his resurrection:

I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. ---John 16:20-21

What is the source of the disciples' joy? Answer: the presence of Jesus: "I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice." No Christian can have fullness of joy without a vital fellowship with Jesus Christ. Knowledge about him will not do and work for him will not do. We must have personal, vital fellowship with him;

otherwise Christianity becomes a joyless burden. In his first letter John wrote, "Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be full" (1 John 1:4). Fellowship with Jesus shared with others is essential to fullness of joy.

The first reason then why prayer leads to fullness of joy is that prayer is the nerve center of our fellowship with Jesus. He is not here physically to see. But in prayer we speak to him just as though he were here. And in the stillness of those sacred times we listen to his thoughts and we pour out to him our longings. Perhaps John 15:7 is the best summary of this two-sided fellowship: "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done for you." When the words of Jesus abide in our mind we hear the very thoughts of the living Christ, for he is the same yesterday, today and forever. And out of that deep listening of the heart comes the language of prayer which is a sweet incense before God's throne. The life of prayer leads to fullness of joy because prayer is the nerve center of our vital fellowship with Jesus.

The **other reason** prayer produces fullness of joy is that prayer provides the power to do what we love to do, but can't do without God's help. The text says, "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." Fellowship with Jesus is essential to joy but there is something about it that impels us outward to share his life with others. A Christian can't be happy and stingy, because it is more blessed to give than to receive. Therefore, the second reason a life of prayer leads to fullness of joy is that it gives us the power to love. If the pump of love runs dry it is because the pipe of prayer isn't deep enough.

In summary: The Bible plainly teaches that the goal of all we do should be to glorify God. But it also teaches that in all we do we should pursue the fullness of our joy. Some theologians have tried to force these two pursuits apart by asking questions like, "Are you willing to be damned for the glory of God?" But the Bible does not force us to choose between God's glory and our joy. In fact, it forbids us to choose. And what we have seen from John's gospel is that prayer, perhaps more clearly than anything else, embodies the unity of these two pursuits. Prayer pursues joy in fellowship with Jesus and in the power to share his life with others. And prayer pursues God's glory by treating him as the reservoir of hope. In prayer we admit our poverty and God's prosperity, our bankruptcy and his bounty, our misery and his mercy. Therefore, prayer highly exalts and glorifies God precisely by pursuing everything we long for in him and not in ourselves. "**Ask and you will receive, that the Father may be glorified in the Son and that your joy may be full.**"

This is why the Bible teaches:

But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. ---James 1:6-8

How many times have we gone to Jesus with something; thinking that He would not answer us? We have to realize that when we ask in His name that He will answer. We will not ALWAYS get the answer in the way we want it, but I can tell you that I am glad God did not give me everything I asked for. You have heard, be careful what you ask for. God wants us to ask of Him.

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. ---James 1:17

Every good thing comes from the Father! God does not get sick of hearing from you! When Jesus tells us to ask, the form of the word translated "ask" means to KEEP ON ASKING. Jesus tells us to keep asking in His name. Jesus is there to make intercession for us! (Hebrews 7:24-25.)

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ---James 1:5

God does not look at you and tell you that you are dumb for asking. We can ask God to help us in every area of our lives. We do not have because we do not ask! Now let us look at the something else we receive from God when we ask!

III. THE BLESSING.

I do not know about you, but just the thought of receiving what I ask for in the name of Jesus is enough, but look at what the rest of verse 24 tells us! Jesus says that He will give us what we ask for in His name so that OUR JOY will be made full! Through constant fellowship with God in prayer and through receiving answers to prayer, whatever is lacking in our joy will be supplied by Jesus! Here Jesus is

getting ready to face the cross, He knows the pain and agony He is going to suffer, and yet His focus is on making the joy of His followers full.

Joy is an inner peace that comes from knowing that God is in control. The great blessing is the fact that Jesus is there with you, that He hears you and that He answers your prayers. One of the confirmations I have concerning the existence of God is the answered prayers I have received from Him. Jesus does not want you to live a miserable life, He wants you to experience joy to the fullest!

CONCLUSION

Is your prayer life a bit blah? Do you feel like God does not hear you? Do you feel distant from God? Let me suggest that you take John 16:24 to heart.

Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. ---John 16:24

Take the time to get to know the Lord you love, as you get to know Him more, you will find that your prayer life changes. You will start to experience greater joy in your life, because that is what Jesus wants for you!

ILLUSTRATION: The Japanese introduced a tree to the world that is called a Bonsai tree. It is measured in inches instead of feet as other trees are measured. It is not allowed to reach anywhere near its full growth potential but instead grows in a stunted miniature form. The reason for it growing in stunted form is that when it first stuck its head out of the ground as a sapling, the owner pulled it out of the soil and tied off its main tap root and some of its branch feeder roots and then replanted it. By doing this, its grower deliberately stunted its growth by limiting the roots ability to spread out and grow deep and take in enough of the soils nutrients for a normal growth. What was done to the Bonsai tree by its owner is what it is like being a non-praying believer. We are tying off our tap root of prayer. We limit our receiving in prayer what God supplies for our spiritual growth.