

John 16:23-30 | Easter 6 - Prayer

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²³*In that day you will not ask me anything. Amen, Amen, I tell you: Whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you.* ²⁴*Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask, and you will receive, so that your joy may be made complete.* ²⁵*I have told you these things using figurative language. A time is coming when I will no longer speak to you using figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father.* ²⁶***In that day you will ask in my name***, and I am not telling you that I will make requests of the Father on your behalf. ²⁷*For the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.* ²⁸*I came from the Father and have come into the world. **Now I am going to leave the world and go to the Father.*** ²⁹*“Yes!” his disciples said. “Now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative language.* ³⁰*Now we know that you know everything and do not need to have anyone ask you anything. For this reason we believe that you came from God.”*

Prayer

On Thursday of this week, we will celebrate the Ascension, the day Jesus ascended into heaven. That means Easter will be over, our paschal candle will be extinguished, it means Jesus' has left this world physically. But it's kind of odd to celebrate a going away, and the going away of our Savior, of all people. But in our lesson today, we see that Jesus doesn't leave us unprepared. He doesn't leave us without telling us what we are to do in His physical absence, when we have needs. Because after the ascension, the disciples are just like us. Jesus is no longer with them visibly. They have needs, we have needs. He instructs us, along with His disciples, whom He told He was going away, that we are to pray.

But how do you feel about prayer? How do you feel about your own prayer life? Is it pretty good, good enough, or is it not what it should be?

Maybe you don't pray very often, because when you do, you feel a little foolish. It all seems a little cartoonish, a little too much like those old *Precious Moments* drawings, the children kneeling at their soft bed. The whole prayer thing just seems childish, doesn't it? Plus, maybe when you have prayed, it just hasn't seemed to work.

Or maybe you pray reluctantly. You pray, and you know God wants you to, but you don't have a whole lot of certainty. You think, "Why would God answer my prayers? Does prayer actually work?" Maybe you feel a little forgotten by God.

Or Maybe you admit your prayer life isn't what it should be. You know God said in James that "you do not have because you do not ask." And you haven't really asked that much. I'm sure that in your life, as in mine, there are circumstances that often come and go, unprayed for, unasked for. And maybe you feel guilty that you haven't prayed like you ought.

If you are one of these, what does Jesus have to say about your prayer life, through our text?

If when you pray, you think that it's a little childish, Jesus wants you to know that it *is*. It is, because that's who you are. Jesus specifically mentions six times in this short section of Scripture that we pray to "our Father." That means that you are a child. Children ask things of their parents because they aren't able to do them or get them. If you're in middle school, you ask to be driven to soccer practice. If you're in elementary school, you ask for food. If you're 3, you ask for just about everything. You and I are children who have needs. We need to be clothed. We need to be fed. We need to have our sins forgiven. We need strength to make it

another day, and especially, the strength to make it to eternity. We pray to “our Father” because we have needs.

Recognizing that we have needs and that we’re children, should give us the right perspective on praying. If you think that *because* you pray, because you’re giving your time, your precious time, your 30-seconds a week, to God, that God will or should listen to you, Jesus says that’s not a prayer at all. He says **“whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.”**

Prayer requires faith. If you don't have faith, you can't pray. And if we think the power is in our prayer, then our faith is misplaced. Because if we think that our words should cause God to do something for us, then we're not trusting God's power, or Jesus' work; we're trusting our own power and our own work.

Our faith then, really isn't in God at all, it's in ourselves; in what we do. It's possible to use prayerful words but not pray. It's possible to speak about *heaven* but think only about *earth*. We do this when we speak to God about all the things He should send us from heaven, all the while we're thinking it's because of what we've done here on earth. When we do this, even though we may invoke Jesus' name, we're not praying “in Jesus' name,” we're praying in our own.

The only way we can pray, the only way God hears us is because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Jesus says this: **“In that day you will ask in My name.”** “That day” is the day Jesus' died on the cross. On our own, we couldn't have access to our Father in heaven. So heaven came to us. Jesus came to earth, died on the cross, and removed the barrier between us and the Father. He made you a child of God, He established your relationship with God. Without Him, you would have nowhere to turn, nowhere to go. God doesn't answer our prayer because we do it, He answers it because of Jesus. He wants you to ask in Jesus' name, in faith.

Or, what if you pray reluctantly? You think, “Why would God answer my prayers? Does prayer actually work?”

Look at what Jesus says **“I am not telling you that I will make requests of the Father on your behalf. For the Father himself loves you.”** The Father hears you not because of what you've done or haven't done, He hears you because of Jesus.

that's why we pray “in Jesus' name.” When Jesus tells us to pray “In my name,” it isn't that Jesus is setting up some formulaic prayer, some magic words, where, if we say them right, we'll get what we want. What Jesus is saying is that God answers our prayers because of His grace and mercy, shown to us already in Christ. God is our Father who gives us what is best for us, and He's told us what is best for us in the Lord's Prayer.

If you examine what you pray every week in the Lord's Prayer, you'll see that God does give you everything you ask. God hallows His name, He allows you to come here to hear His true Word. God's kingdom comes to you; God gives you the Holy Spirit through His Word. God's will is done; He is constantly hindering every evil thing which would not let His name be hallowed or His kingdom come. If you're still alive, then He has given you your daily bread, in fact He's given you more than you need. He's forgiven your sins through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. He keeps you from temptation, not letting the devil, the world, or our own flesh deceive us and

lead us into unbelief. And finally, God will deliver you from evil. He does that even through death.

You can pray all of those petitions unconditionally, knowing that God has, does, and will answer them. But that doesn't mean you can't ask for anything else. We are free to ask for everything. It just means that we ask everything else "according to God's will" and "in Jesus' name."

Right after Jesus taught His disciples the Lord's prayer, He told them a short parable: *"If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"* (Luke 11:11-13)

Sometimes that's what we're asking for - we're asking for a snake. We're asking for a scorpion, without even knowing it. When we pray for a million dollars, when we pray that God judges someone else for hurting us, when we pray for that girl to like us, or for God to give us a new job, or whatever, it might actually be something harmful that we're praying for. God knows better than to give us that. He is our "heavenly Father" who will give us what is best. That might even mean that the sickness or pain we experience is actually the best thing for us. We don't know, but God does.

And it could be that, at times like this, that we're so distraught, so confused, so distressed, that we don't even know what to pray for. We don't know where to begin. Maybe all we can utter is a "Lord, help me." "Lord, have mercy." Or maybe we're not even able to utter those three words. But Jesus says don't be afraid, don't feel guilty, don't doubt.

Jesus goes to the Father for you. ***"I came from the Father and have come into the world. Now I am going to leave the world and go to the Father."***

That's what Ascension is. ***"Christ Jesus, who died and...was raised to life, is the one who is at God's right hand and who is also interceding for us!"*** (Romans 8:34). That's why ascension is so important and awesome: Jesus intercedes for us in heaven. And at Pentecost, He sends the Holy Spirit to intercede for us here. ***"In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we should pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that are not expressed in words."*** (Romans 8:26)

If you desire your prayer life to be better, know that the Father loves you, Jesus intercedes for you, and the Holy Spirit prays for you.. God wants to hear from you: So Jesus encourages you, ***"Ask, and you will receive, so that your joy may be made complete."***

Use today and these next three days before Ascension, to pray. Use the Lord's Prayer as your model. Pray those petitions and see how the Father makes your joy complete.

You can pray because Jesus has ascended to the Father. You have Christ's promise that God answers you for His sake. You have Christ's promise that God is your Father who gives you what is best. You have Christ's promise that, even if you don't know what to ask, how to ask, or are unable to ask, He goes to the Father for you. He has died, and risen, and ascended for you.

He lives to bless you with His love; He lives to plead for you above. He lives your hungry soul to feed. He lives to help in time of need.

His resurrection as the proof. God hears your prayers, and as you continue to come before Him, God will make your joy complete. Because Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Amen.