

## **Prayerful, Plentiful Peace**

What does it mean to pray “in Jesus’ name”? It must be a ***big deal***, right? After all, Jesus makes a point of telling the apostles that even after three years with Him, they had yet to pray in His name. But...from this moment on, they will be praying in His name, and “*whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He will give it you. Ask, and you will receive....*” Clearly, there’s going to be something **very different** about Christian prayer from that point on.

Okay...so does that mean that all those prayers that came before were somehow null and void? Did those prayers not count? Were they not as good as prayers made in the name of Jesus? Notice: I didn’t ask if those pre-in-the-name-of-Jesus prayers were somehow ***ineffective***. We know that’s not the case. If that were the case, then we’re forced to admit that prayers from the likes of Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah were also ineffective because they, too, weren’t prayed in Jesus’ name. **We know that certainly was not the case!** Our Old Testament lesson for this morning [the Bronze Serpent account] gives us a prime example of that, Moses praying for the people as they’re being slaughtered by the fiery serpents, and God answering the prayer with His Word and Promise of the Bronze Serpent.

So...what makes the prayers that will be prayed in Jesus’ name “better” or different from any of the prayers offered up to God before this? Well...this shouldn’t come as a shock to any of you, but ***context matters***. The way we properly answer this and understand this is when we consider it in context. Jesus is teaching here about praying in His name at the ***very end*** of His earthly ministry. Yes, He also taught His disciples about “asking and receiving” at the beginning of His ministry [the Sermon on the Mount], and He reiterated this throughout His three years with them. But...tonight is **different**. Here He’s teaching specifically about praying in His name at the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday evening.

Think about that. Let that sink in. Jesus’ betrayal and arrest is less than an hour away! In less than twelve hours, Jesus will be beaten, humiliated, and nailed to a cross like He’s some kind of degenerate criminal. I often wonder how many of these guys would be praying to God during this time that Jesus would somehow get free? How many of these guys would be praying that God would “save” Jesus (and them) from all this ***pain and suffering and despair?*** How many of these disciples would look upon their crucified Savior and pray words very similar to the mocking of the Pharisees. “*God, please let Jesus come down off that cross! Please save Him!*” How many of these guys would be praying over the next couple days that this was all just a terrible nightmare? “*God, let me wake up! Make this terrible nightmare stop!*” I know I would. You would too.

As I've said many times over these past few weeks, these guys didn't understand. They didn't understand the *necessity* of the cross. They didn't understand the cruciform mission and ministry of Jesus. They loved Jesus, no doubt about it. They loved God. They also *firmly believed* that they were sinful and in need of deliverance from their sin. That wasn't a problem either. It wasn't an act. It wasn't false humility. They firmly believed they needed saving. There was no "holier than thou," hypocritical attitude on their part. And yet...when they see this salvation—this deliverance from evil and the evil one (which they were taught to pray for)—lifted up and playing out before their very eyes, they *reject* it; they *despise* it; they pray for it to stop.

But...this [the crucifix] is precisely what Jesus is talking about when He speaks of praying in His name. "*At the name of Jesus, every knee will bow...*," right? Folks: That knee-bending, powerful name—the name we call upon God in, and pray, praise and give thanks in—is the name of Him who *vicariously and lovingly* suffered the full wrath of His Father against all our sin. It is the name of Him who paid for each and every sin for every person for all time with His own lifeblood. Like the angel told Joseph, "*He will be named 'Jesus' because He will save His people from their sins.*" This God-given name means something! This [the crucifix] is where that Divinely-promised salvation was accomplished. ***This is where the God-given name fulfilled the God-given mission.*** "*It is finished*" was spoken here as He gave up the Spirit and peacefully commended Himself into His Father's hands.

Now...this [the crucifix] tends to put everything in a *very sobering, proper perspective*, doesn't it? ***It should.*** Here is He who suffered all for us. Here is God's full wrath against sin. Here is God's absolute and unconditional love for you...nailed to a bloody cross, beaten, abused, and utterly forsaken. Here is He who saved us from our sins...***and we use His name to ask Almighty God that the McRib still be on the menu, or that our cell phone gets better reception so we can post that oh-so-important Facebook update.*** "*[Selfie] Got a manicure and a scone! #Blessed!*" We so often pray in Jesus' name when we should really be praying in our own name. After all, we're the god we're most concerned about.

To pray in the name of Jesus is different though. It's a prayer that *only* a faithful Christian can truly pray. Anyone can tack the name of Jesus onto the end of a prayer. Anyone can sprinkle the name of Jesus into a prayer. ***Anyone can, and anyone often does.*** But...only a faithful Christian can truly pray in the name of Jesus, for to pray in the name of Jesus is to pray in the name of Him who conquered sin, death, and the devil by dying and rising again. Death has no dominion over Him, for He is "Domini"—all-mighty and all-powerful God. To pray in Jesus' name is to pray in the name of the crucified and resurrected Lamb of God, who eternally bears the marks of our salvation on His body, ever-reminding

His heavenly Father that it is finished, once and for all; ever-proclaiming and showing forth the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding. To pray in Jesus' name is to pray in the very name that God Himself has put upon our heads and our hearts, marking us as one redeemed by Christ the Lord, ***baptized into His all-redeeming, life-saving death and resurrection.*** In this way, it is a prayer offered up in total peace; the peace of our baptismal grace; the peace that surpasses all human understanding.

*“In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart, for I have overcome the world.”* This is our post-ascension reality. It is finished, once and for all. He is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia! ***This is our post-ascension reality.*** Things are definitely different on this side of the cross/tomb...***even our prayers.*** Knowing what we know; believing what we believe, we do pray differently. We pray with a peace that the rest of the world does not know. Do all our prayers get answered? **Yes!** Many people don't believe that, but it's true. For the Christian, there is no such thing as “unanswered prayer.” God answers **all** prayer, but...like a loving Father, He sometimes says “no.” Sometimes He answers those prayers in ways we would never expect or even desire; case in point—the cross of Jesus Christ. *“Deliver us from evil...”* ***There's the answer to that petition!*** Even as we pray for the earthly things (which our Lord does command us to do; e.g., “pray for those in authority,” “give us this day our daily bread....,” we pray for those who are sick and ailing, we pray for medical miracles and safe passage and even a good night's sleep), we pray with a ***peace and assurance*** that trusts in God above all things; that trust that God knows what He's doing, and He's working all things for our good and for the good of all those who love Him.

And that's where I want to end today—the peace of God; the ***cruciform peace*** that is yours in Christ Jesus and because of Christ Jesus. That's what all this is all about. So often lessons on prayer get turned into “how-to” lessons; i.e., how to pray more effectively, how to pray “better” or more powerfully, how to make God happy with your prayer...all things which God Himself **NEVER** taught in His Holy Word. Call upon God. Talk to God, in good times and in bad, richer or poorer, in sickness or in good health. Call upon Him in the name of Jesus; in the name of the One who took on your flesh, suffered your death and damnation; the One who lives and reigns victoriously, seated at the right hand of the Father, forever showing forth and declaring your justification and salvation.

When this [the crucifix] is at the center of all that you say, think, and do, ***you will see things differently. You'll live differently. You'll pray differently.*** You will ask whatever it is you ask of the Father, and “My will” will be “Thy will.” That's not a prescription or a “how-to.” **That's just fact. That's reality.** May this cruciform reality be your reality, now, even as you suffer trials and tribulations, and into all eternity. May this blessed, cruciform reality guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, and give you His peace. **AMEN**