

## “The Gift of Jesus-Based Prayer”

St. John 16:23-33

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SERMON 1914

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The sermon text is from John 16:23, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.”

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is now the third week that we have the Gospel reading taken Jesus’ comforting sermon to His disciples on Maundy Thursday. During that sermon Jesus has explained that their knowledge of Jesus’ person and His salvific mission is none other than to know the Father. The heavenly Father is known in His Son, Jesus Christ. Last week we learned that Jesus was giving the Apostles His Christian message to implant the Word in their hearts and to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. This week we see further that in that sermon Jesus is imparting the gift of prayer in His name. It is another comforting message.

Jesus has been with His disciples for three years. During that time, the Scriptures often record Jesus in prayer. He and His disciples would attend synagogue and public prayer services. Jesus would lead the disciples in prayer. Jesus would steal away from the others to pray privately early in the morning or late at night. Prayer was a regular activity with which He and His disciples were regularly engaged.

When Jesus speaks to the disciples about how they did not previously ask the Father in His name, Jesus is not saying that they didn’t pray at all. On the contrary, they prayed often and regularly. **Jesus had rightly taught them to pray based on the promises of Old Testament Scriptures.** On Maundy Thursday, Jesus begins to teach His disciples that His own death and resurrection will have a profound effect upon their prayer. From now on they will pray in Jesus’ name and the Father will answer their prayer in Jesus’ name. **All of Christ’s disciples, including you and I, will pray based on the fulfilled promises of the New Testament.** Let’s take a look at this gift of Jesus-based prayer.

**Prayer is an exercise of faith.** It is not simply a recitation of certain words. Although Jesus does teach the disciples to use the specific words of the Lord’s Prayer, Nevertheless, Jesus is not advocating the mindless repetition of certain words, as you might see in the meditation practices of Buddhism and used in yoga. Pagan meditation involves the recitation of mantras as a means of enlightenment. The person uses the mantra to take control of their mind and thus supposedly become more focused and peaceful.

Christian prayer is not saying the vocables of a mantra to calm yourself. It is not saying the words of a spell which somehow forces God to act. **Faith speaks to God asking Him for the things which He has told us we need and which He desires to give us.** Prayer requires faith. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Thus, God

speaks in His Word and we respond with prayer, that is, speaking to the God in whom we believe and asking for the things He has promised to give.

**In the Old Testament, the Triune God gave His Old Testament believers promises.** They prayed for the defeat of the devil as God had promised in Genesis 3:15 when He told of the coming of a male child of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent. The LORD God showed his care for Adam and Eve as He “made tunics of skin and clothed them” (Gen 3:21). They relied upon God for daily sustenance, despite the consequences of sin. In Genesis 3:19, God had promised, “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground.” In faith, Abel brought a prayer of thanksgiving along with the burnt offering of his animals.

Noah relied on God’s promise to save him and his family by means of an ark. Although we don’t have the recorded prayers of Noah before the flood, we do see his faith-filled actions. Abram was given great promises of God to turn him into a great nation, to give him a promised land and to bless all people through the coming of the Savior in his descendants. Abram “often built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD” (Gen 12:8).

When God brought His people out of Egypt, we have Moses continuing in prayer. He often directly quotes God’s promises in prayer. In effect, Moses says, “God, you promised. You have to keep your promises and bless your people.” The most famous of those promise-based prayers of Moses comes when he prays for the people’s forgiveness after the golden calf catastrophe. God’s gracious and approving response to Moses’ prayer is quite comforting.

Exodus 32:11-14, “Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said:

“Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?

12Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, ‘He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people.

13“Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’ ”

14So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.”

Up until His sermon on Maundy Thursday, **Jesus had rightly taught his disciples to pray based on the promises of Old Testament Scriptures.** But now that He is going away—through His death, resurrection, and ascension—and He is sending these Apostles His Holy Spirit to take the Word out to the ends of the world, it is now time that they pray in a new way. Rather than praying based on the promises of a future fulfillment, they are now to pray based on Jesus’ fulfillment of all those promises.

--Jesus is the male child who crushed the head of the serpent and defeated the devil. Death is swallowed up by death, its sting is lost forever.

--Jesus is the one through whom Father Abraham will bless us. All who believe in Jesus Christ are descendants of Abraham.

--Through the waters of baptism, Jesus provided the ark of His church to raise us up above this world’s condemnation.

The serpent set up on a pole was a picture of the Savior on the cross, condemned on our behalf.

--Jesus is the reason we have forgiveness. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all trusted in Him, and now we have seen the fulfillment of all things in God's Son.

That reminds me of the promised Old Testament Word given to Jacob at a place called Bethel. Genesis 28:12-13 says, "Then {Jacob} he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13And behold, the Lord stood above it and said: 'I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.'"

**Jesus Christ is the ladder to heaven and from heaven. This story teaches us the importance of our New Testament Savior. All New Testament believers will pray in Jesus' name and the Father will answer their prayer in Jesus' name. All communication from the heavenly Father comes through Jesus. All of our prayer directed back to the Father goes through Jesus. All ascending and descending comes through Jesus, the heavenly ladder.**

It is on that Maundy Thursday evening that Jesus gives out **this comforting message concerning the gift of prayer in His name**. I read again from today's Holy Gospel, Jesus says, "

"Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. <sup>24</sup>Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:23-24).

**What a promise! What a privilege** we have as believers in Jesus Christ! Forgiven sinners have access to the Father's ear in Jesus' Name. Our prayer is answered, and our needs are supplied in Jesus' name. God is giving out the fullness of joy in Jesus' name.

Not only do we need this comfort—as did the apostles on the night that Jesus was betrayed—but **we need the encouragement to exercise our Christian faith in fervent and faith-filled prayer in Jesus' name**. We are weak in prayer, because we do not spend enough time relishing in our Savior's promises to us. Luther says,

"It is truly a great shame and a harsh punishment among us Christians that He should still reproach us for our laziness in prayer and that we do not let such rich and excellent promises incite us to pray. We leave this precious treasure lying there and do not attempt to use it to experience the power in such promises" (LW v.77, p.253).

**Let us confess that we have not been diligent in our prayers with excuse after excuse**. Before we were too busy to pray. Now we are just too lazy. There are no government restrictions on prayer. Your need is probably greater. Your danger is no doubt more pronounced. Our God has provided a wonderful tool in prayer. Pick it up and use it.

My dear Christian friends, be doers of the Word and not hearers only. Hear the Word so that it creates and strengthens faith in God's promises, AND then exercise that faith through prayer in Jesus' name. St. Paul says, "I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men..." (1 Tim 2:1).

As I speak with people, I find that not everything is honky-dory. There are those who are sick. There are those who are concerned about sickness. There are those who are unemployed. There are those who are busy and overworked. There are those with family conflicts and struggles. Jesus' Maundy Thursday sermon has words of comfort. He says, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Earlier Jesus said, "Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

Get on your knees and pray in Jesus' name. Until you tell me that you have too much peace, an exceeding fullness of joy and so much overflowing comfort that you can't stand anymore of it, then you ought to be praying in Jesus' name. If you are need, Jesus has provided prayer to the Father in His name.

God had Moses place the bronze snake on a pole so that any who were bitten, would look at it and trusting in the promise concerning it would live. We know the plain truth of the redemption secured by Jesus lifted up on the cross. The apostles were still dealing with figurative language on Maundy Thursday, but by Easter Sunday evening, they knew the reality of what Jesus' words meant that night. We live in that day, of which Jesus said we would know it all plainly.

We know the blessings which come to us through Jesus who suffered, died and rose again. We also know that we can come to the Father in prayer through Jesus. Our heavenly Father has not limited access to Himself to a Temple or even a church building. Through faith in Jesus—that is, in Jesus' name—we are the Beth-el of God. We are the house of God, and our God is ascending and descending on the ladder of Jesus Christ.