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Praying for Greater Works

John 14:13-14

Intro: Last time, we concluded our study by looking at the Lord's amazing promise to His disciples in vs12. Jesus, by way of comforting the disciples in advance, declares that even though He'll be leaving them soon, this doesn't mean that His work on earth is complete for they will continue it. And, not just continue it, but expand it to a greater degree!

Of course, as we pointed out, some have tried to claim that Jesus was referring to His miracles, signs and wonders but neither the Scriptures nor historical evidence bears that out. In fact, it is precisely because miracles are so rare that we still think of them as being great works. They're only great to us because we can't do them.

No, the greater works Jesus was referring to was the spiritual miracle of regeneration performed by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of sinners as a result of hearing the Gospel message. This is the only miracle that God deems to be great. This is the promise Jesus gave to comfort His disciples in their last hours together. This same promise applies to every believer; a promise that meets the greatest need of the world today.

What is the world's greatest need? The list of just spiritual needs is staggering. We see a rise in biblical illiteracy. Not only are people clueless as to what the Bible says, they're not even interested. Clearly, we need more engaging and anointed Bible teachers. In an age marked by greed and consumerism we need a resurgence of integrity and generosity. When sexual promiscuity is so common in a society that it's actually expected, we long for individuals who will stand up for and insist on purity. None of these needs are confined to the world of lost humanity for they all permeate the church. Add to that a need for visible love among believers; racial reconciliation, evangelism, church planting and missions; the list grows longer and longer and the needs become overwhelming.

All of these needs are real and important but they are merely symptoms of a greater, far more serious lack. The one thing we most urgently need is a deeper knowledge of God. We need to know God better. Sad to say, the culture of the Church in the West is that of the spiritually stunted. So much

of church life today is packaged to address our “felt needs” and these are almost always attached to our own pursuit of happiness and fulfillment, without really knowing or understanding where true happiness and fulfillment lie. People go to church by the thousands with the concept of “what can God do for me today.” They never consider what God is like – His wisdom, knowledge, power, love, glory.

From the biblical perspective, a deeper knowledge of God is always accompanied by improvements in the areas already mentioned: purity, integrity, generosity, a heart for the lost, love for believers, a better grasp of Scripture. The danger here is if we seek all these things without passionately desiring a deeper knowledge of God, we end up chasing after God’s blessings or pursuing His power without pursuing Him. We then become worse than shallow lovers; those who want the advantages of having a spouse without the bother of soul intimacy. We’re worse than that because God is more than a wife or husband. He’s perfect in His love and He has made us for Himself and all the highest aspirations and greatest joys of our lives are rightfully found only in Him.

The greatest need of the lost is to come to know God through knowing Jesus Christ. Thus, the greatest work we can do as Christians is to prepare ourselves to meet that need by growing in our own knowledge and understanding of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and God the Father. This is critical because knowing God better allows us to better understand both His Word and His will for our lives which enables us to share that knowledge (and experience) with others. That is what makes the promise of vs12 so amazing, so encouraging and so comforting!

It’s most likely impossible to have a greater promise from the Lord Jesus Christ than that which is recorded in vs12. If there was a promise that could be considered greater, it would probably be the one that follows immediately after.

13-14- This promise was given to the disciples as one part of the Lord’s attempt to comfort them prior to His pending departure. He’s going to be taken from them so He first promises that His leaving will not be the end of His work on earth for they will continue it. Second, He promises that His leaving will not be the end of the communion they had enjoyed with Him. He’ll be in heaven and they’ll be on earth but prayer will remove all sense of

distance between them. In fact, prayer will be the key for their doing the greater works He promised.

How comforting is that? To know that no matter where you are or what you're doing, you can enter into God's presence and immediately enjoy close, intimate fellowship with Him – with the entire Godhead - through the gift of prayer. It's even more comforting to know that there is no limitation to the gift of prayer. It's not limited to a location (church), position (kneeling), or mind set (holy / pious). There is no limitation as to language, culture, education, IQ, amount of faith or spiritual maturity. In fact, the only limitations there are to prayer are the ones we create ourselves.

“Who would do such a thing?” Well, since prayer is one of the most misunderstood and neglected of the spiritual disciplines, I'd had to say - a whole lot of Christians are guilty of doing just that.

Let's look at 2 theological extremes and see if you recognize any of them in modern Christian culture. One extreme surmises that it's inappropriate to ask God for anything. They hold that God's completely sovereign and doesn't need our counsel on anything. If He is the One “who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Eph 1:11b) then surely it's presumptuous for us to badger Him for things. This line of thought views petitionary prayer as disrespectful at best and, at worst, an insult to a sovereign and holy God. If God is really sovereign, He's going to do whatever He wants to do whether or not He's asked to do it. Christians who believe this are more in line with the Muslim's fatalistic approach to Allah. We can readily see the fallacy of this approach to God but then, how much do we pray?

The 2nd extreme goes like this, “Prayer changes things,” meaning petitionary prayer is everything. So, if people die and go to hell it's because you or I or someone else has neglected to pray. From this perspective, failure to intercede for others is to abdicate your responsibilities as a Christian. If you agonize in prayer, fast often, plead the name of Jesus and spend countless hours interceding, you can't help but call down a multitude of blessings from heaven. Of course, if a Christian accepts this perspective, they're in danger of treating prayer as if it were like magic: the right incantation over the longest period of time produces the desired effect.

Obviously, both extremes are wrong, dangerously wrong. Yet, they both

stem from Biblical truths. It is true that God is completely sovereign. But, it is also true that the Bible insists everywhere that we are to pray. It urges us to pray, it gives countless examples of prayer. Something has gone wrong with our reasoning if our reasoning leads us away from prayer. Something is wrong with out theology if our theology creates a disincentive to pray.

Here are 2 truths that are taught all over the Bible that bear remembering when considering prayer. 1) God is absolutely sovereign but in Scripture, His sovereignty never functions to reduce human responsibility. 2) Humans are responsible creatures (they choose, believe, disobey and respond) and there is moral significance and eternal consequence in their choices. But, in Scripture, human responsibility never operates to diminish God's sovereignty. God is sovereign but He is also personal and He has determined that many blessings will only come to us through the channel of prayer, through seeking Him. Prayer is His ordained means of conveying His blessings to His people.

This not only reveals the importance of prayer but it's also comforting to know God hears our prayers simply because He wants us to pray. There's comfort in found our text but it's not really comfort that makes this promise so striking. What's most striking is the scope of the promise. It's not just that His disciples have the privilege of prayer, nor even that He would hear their prayers and answer their requests from time to time. The promise is that Jesus would hear their prayers and would grant their requests always; if they ask anything in the name of Jesus, they will have it! Of course, there are certain conditions that must be met to see this promise fulfilled. The 1st is contained in the phrase "in My name" or as we say, "in the name of Jesus." What does it mean to ask something from God in Jesus' name?

It means several things. 1st) It means we come to God as those who are identified with Jesus by faith, as Christians. This is very important. We must begin any study of prayer by realizing that prayer is for Christians *only*. This is clear in 2 ways: (1) the word *you* refers only to the disciples and to all those who follow them in faith; and (2) the phrase "he who believes in Me," in [vs12](#). These phrases limit the verses to Christians. The Bible never promises that God will hear and answer a non-Christian's prayer. That's not to say that God can't or never does hear the prayers of the unsaved, it's just that He never promises to hear them; He hasn't obligated Himself to them as He has to believers.

2nd) Praying “in Jesus’ name” means approaching God on no other basis than what Jesus has done. Here’s where most Christians run into trouble getting their prayers answered. Often, when we pray and don’t get what we ask, it’s because we’ve not prayed in Jesus’ name (though we’ve said those words) but because we’ve prayed in our own name thinking we have some claim on God. A story from the life of R. A. Torrey (19th Century evangelist and pastor) will illustrate this point. He was in Australia for some meetings and as he went to the platform to speak, a note was put in his hands which read, “Dear Dr. Torrey: I am in great perplexity. I have been praying for a long time for something that I am confident is according to God’s will, but I do not get it. I have been a member of the Presbyterian Church for thirty years, and have tried to be a consistent one all the time. I have been superintendent in the Sunday school for twenty-five years, and an elder in the church for twenty years; and yet God does not answer my prayer and I cannot understand it. Can you explain it to me?” Dr. Torrey read the note from the platform and answered it.

He said, “It is perfectly easy to explain it. This man thinks that because he’s been a consistent church member for 30 years, a faithful Sunday school superintendent for 25 years, and an elder in the church for 20 years, that God is under obligation to answer his prayer. He is really praying in his own name, and God will not hear our prayers when we approach Him in that way. We must, if we would have God answer our prayers, give up any thought that we have any claims upon God. There is not one of us who deserves anything from God. If we got what we deserved, every one of us would spend eternity in hell. But Jesus Christ has great claims on God, and we should go to God in our prayers not on the ground of any goodness in ourselves, but on the ground of Jesus Christ’s claims.”

Many Christians make the same mistake. They believe that since they have done certain things for God, they now have a claim on Him, that God owes them. The problem is: no sinful human being has ever had any claim on God. Only Jesus Christ has a claim. Thus, to pray in the name of Jesus is 1) to come to God as a Christian, having believed on Jesus, and 2) to come humbly, recognizing that we have no claims on Him but that Jesus does. It’s true that we can approach God boldly on that basis but it’s also true we can approach God solely on that basis.

Although this is true, there are many who still think that praying in the name of Jesus is like waving a magic wand over their own desires to make them be granted. These folks may be quick to admit that one must certainly be a Christian in order to pray effectively. They'll even admit that we cannot come to God on the basis of our own merit. I mean, every Christian knows that! Still, they continue in use the name of Jesus as an incantation to get their desires. We should add a 3rd) point. To pray in Jesus' name is to pray as one who lives the life of Christ; to pray as He would pray and to pray for what He desires. To pray in Jesus' name is a serious matter, not to be taken lightly because a consistent Christ-like lifestyle reveals that God can trust us with His blessings. God will never waste a blessing or a kindness on a careless, selfish saint.

Finally, there is one other requirement. Yes, we must be a believer that comes to God on the basis of what Jesus has done while living (and praying) in a manner consistent with His desires. But, our text also includes the phrase, "that the Father may be glorified in the Son." This is important for if we believe that our prayers must be consistent with the desires of Jesus then the next obvious question will be, "What does Jesus desire?" The short answer is in this phrase – Jesus' desire is that the Father may be glorified. So, if this is Jesus' desire than it should also be ours!

This may be a radical new idea for the modern Christian. We're so saturated with the idea that prayer is the means of getting something from God, we rarely consider that prayer is actually a means by which God gets something from us. What God wants from us is glory, a glory that will lead others to trust in Him. The goal of prayer is not the fulfilling of our own requests but the glorification of God. That was the ultimate goal of Christ's earthly ministry. In fact, He declares this in [17:4](#) "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do."

This is a wonderful truth and we know that it is true but here's the thing we rarely consider: the way Jesus brought glory to the Father was not by any way that we would call glorious. He was a wandering preacher with no place to lay His head. He was misunderstood and ridiculed. Even His own disciples failed to really understand Him. One of them would betray Him, another would deny Him; all would desert Him. Then, on top of all that disappointment, He was arrested, illegally tried, wrongfully condemned, cruelly beaten and mercilessly executed. This was not what we would desire

– for Jesus or ourselves. But yet, this was God’s will for Jesus and it was precisely in these things that God was glorified. We should allow this reality to sink into our hearts and begin to color our own prayers.

Do we really know what this means? If we’ll learn it and accept it, it’ll transform our lives. We’ll no longer be satisfied with a mediocre Christianity. As we go through life, we’ll certainly suffer many of the things that are common to human life. We’ll get sick; we’ll lose loved ones and friends to death. We’ll suffer disappointment in all areas of our lives then eventually, we’ll die too (if the Lord tarries His coming). How will we react in these circumstances? Will we complain and blame God for all our difficulties? Or, will we receive these circumstances from His hand and seek to glorify Him in and through them? If we decide to choose the 2nd option, then we’ll be able to demonstrate to the world the reality of God’s great grace and peace which is produced by God’s sovereign will shown in suffering Christians.

When sorrows come, the world panics because it has no answer in the face of disappointments, no hope in death. Christians, born again believers in Jesus Christ have hope. Plus, we have the privilege of coming to God in prayer so that our will might be made increasingly conformable to His will and so that others might be led to glorify Him through our testimonies. Prayer is not magic and it’s not necessarily focused on getting things from God. It is a privilege of relationship, an avenue of fellowship with our Creator and Savior and when it’s done properly, in the name of Jesus (according to His character and by His authority), it’s the established means by which God’s will is accomplished on this earth. He promised! We have His word on it and God will always honor His Word, even above His own name!

As with any spiritual discipline, there is a real danger here. Just because someone prays regularly does not mean that effective prayer is taking place. The problem is that the outward expressions of genuine godliness are so easily mimicked that it is too often replaced by its barren cousin – formal religion. This is the idea that all one needs to do is go through the ritual, the ceremony, the formality of religious activity and God will be satisfied if not pleased. This idea could not be further from the truth! God is not impressed by religious activity – He’s only concerned with the condition of your heart.

If your life’s a wreck and hope seems out of reach – call out to God for

forgiveness of sin and receive Jesus Christ into your heart as Savior. If you have gone through the motions of religious activity but see no evidence of God's presence in your life or the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, surrender your life to Jesus Christ. Stop trying to earn salvation by currying favor with God and put your faith in the atoning work accomplished by Jesus on the cross. 😊