

APD #6 - ASK PASTOR DON - Sunday, May 3rd, 2020 - 6:30 p.m.

"I'm having a hard time trusting in the promises - especially some of the ones from Jesus Himself - about prayer and receiving answers to my prayers. The promises seem so big and positive. But my prayer life doesn't work that way. I ask for things and don't get them. It's starting to erode my faith. Are those promises true? And if they are, why don't they work? Please help me with this."

You mentioned some of the big promises from Jesus. Let's look at some of those specifically:

John 14:13-14 - "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. [14] If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."

John 15:16 - "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you."

John 16:23 - "In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you."

Our questioner is absolutely right. Those **do** seem like incredibly big and positive promises. And I think they're **supposed** to appear big and positive. Jesus isn't trying to **discourage** prayer in these words. He's trying to **encourage** our praying. He's trying to lift our sights and expand our faith. Jesus never went around telling His faithful followers **not** to pray. He was constantly telling them all to **ask in faith**.

But there's more to consider from God's Word. The Apostle James cautions that we all have a natural hindrance to answered prayer - **James 4:3** - "You ask and do not receive, because you ask **wrongly, to spend it on your passions.**"

Now, this is a fascinating verse - especially those words about "**asking wrongly,**" and spending "**it on your passions.**" If we're not very careful we can wrongly conclude that a very strong inward motivation and desire is the **same** as strong faith. If I pray with a very strong passion it **feels** like that burning desire is identical with confidence in divine promise. After all, I'm really **learning into my prayers**. And that must be what Jesus would want.

Enter James. Strong inward **desire** is not always the same as strong inward **faith**. Sometimes my strong desires are a **help** in my prayers. And sometimes my strong desires **destroy** my prayers.

One other thing before we look at those glorious promises from Jesus. There is a terrible tendency that has grown up in the body of Christ whenever those promises from Jesus are used to create an "**air tight**" prayer system. We must have an explanation when the system doesn't work as we predicted. And the easy out is to tell the petitioner he or she simply didn't have enough faith.

And here's the problem with that diagnosis. If it **isn't** true it's the worst form of spiritual abuse in the church today. And if it **is** true it still isn't helpful. If I truly lack faith - if I'm truly struggling with doubts and fears and unbelief the **last** thing I need to be told is my stumbling prayer life is the result of my stumbling faith. That leads to nothing but deeper discouragement and despair.

Now, with this backdrop understanding of those cautionary words from James about confusing strong passion with praying in faith, let's look at those wonderful promises from Jesus again:

John 14:13-14 - "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. [14] If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."

John 15:16 - "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you."

John 16:23 - "In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you."

There are **variables** in these words. In **14:13-14** Jesus describes asking **Him directly** and **He (Jesus) will answer**. In **15:16** and **16:23** Jesus describes our asking directed to **the Father** and **the Father** answering our requests.

But there's one condition that's exactly the **same** in all these references. The asking must be **in Jesus' name**. Even requests described as being addressed to the Father aren't made in the **Father's name**. The asking in each case - with no exceptions - is to be in **Jesus' name**.

Why? What is this **asking in Jesus' name** all about and why is it the one unalterable condition? And my firm conviction is asking in Jesus' name is the one grand safe-guard to the great **prayer disease James cautioned about**. Asking in Jesus' name isn't a condition to **shrink** my prayers. It's the key to **safe-guarding them and enlarging them**.

So the important question is **what does it mean to pray in Jesus' name?** Everything seems to hinge on this glorious condition. I have a couple of closing thoughts:

- a) **Asking in Jesus' name means recognizing I have no access to the Father in any other way.** This is the starting place for proper praying. I can't get to God the Father without the adopting work of God the Son. The Holy Spirit ingrains the adopting provision of God the Son. This confidence is what births the cries of my heart to Father God. **Prayer is trinitarian**. God cannot be reached by non-trinitarian religion.
- b) **Asking in Jesus' name means bringing petitions Jesus is pleased to associate Himself with.** Here we begin to grasp our Lord's antidote to James deep prayer disease. It means bringing our Lord's heart to the Father's ears through our prayers. We ask for those things our Lord would most deeply long to see accomplished in our lives.

Here's how Jesus worded the same idea in different words (not using, "**asking in my name**") - **John 15:7** - "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

I think you can see this is a huge promise. But it's not left hanging undefined. Notice that word "**if**" at the beginning of the verse. Jesus clearly intends a condition. The secret of the **fruit** in the receiving is the **condition** in the asking. My requests are birthed and shaped by the controlling authority of the words of Jesus abiding in me.

I have one more important idea.

- c) ***To the extent that I feel my requests cramped and limited by the controlling shape of asking in Jesus' name, to that extent my heart is still tilted in the direction of my own passions as James describes.*** All of those promises we read from the lips of Jesus truly are ***glorious***. But before they're glorious, they're ***humbling***. They are loving reminders of what makes life most ***fruitful*** and ***joyful***.

So by all means ***ask***. Prayer is meant to be loaded with petition. But hear our Lord's caution against ***front-loading your prayers with your own desires***. If I'm not very careful those desires ***may*** blind my own heart to my loving Lord's better plans.

Those words from Jesus are all reminders of something God had a hard time teaching His people even under the Old Covenant. Listen freshly to these very old words to the people of God - **Psalm 84:11** - ***"For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly."***