

Prayerful Peace - John 16:23-33 Rogate 2021

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus rest upon each and every one of you this day.

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

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[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.

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.

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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 bottled water at ValuMart is still on sale, or that our cell phone gets better reception so we can post that oh-so-important Facebook update. 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. 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.

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

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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 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