

## Prayer – Attempt Great Things for God

John 14:12-14

### Introduction:

- Who am I to participate in the advancement of the Gospel? Who am I to stand before you this morning and preach the Word of Christ? Who am I to be chosen by God and commissioned by God to serve Him?
- Now I would like to say, that my response is always like this – humble faith. God I don't know how I will do what you have asked of me, but here is my life, use it as you please.
- Sadly, many times my response is the exact opposite – arrogant fear. God I can't do this, I don't know what you are thinking, so I'll just wait here in safety until I have it figured out.
- Now if you are like me, we try to put life into a nice organized box, with a safety cushion around us. We like to have things under control, or more precisely, IN OUR control. The sides of the box are clearly defined with what is comfortable for us (inside the box) and not so comfortable (outside the box). We work hard to fit our family in there, and our work, church, and relationships. It's funny how the simplest things can really mess with our box. Two nights ago one of our two boys, who will remain unnamed, but is the older one who has slept just fine by himself in a bed for many months now, decided he couldn't anymore and got up at 10, 11, 12, and 1am. That did not belong in my box...just in case you were wondering. And it took me a few hours the next morning to remember that God would still give me the strength and grace for that day. Here is the thing. If we are honest with ourselves, eventually we try to put God in the box too. We would prefer if He just kept life simple and comfortable for us. How do I know that...well what we pray for is a pretty good indicator. What I have found out is that usually I pray for things to just get resolved or go away instead of asking God to grow me through the situation. I ask God to give someone a job, but fail to ask God to grow His faith and trust during this time of need. I ask God to remove pain and suffering, but fail to ask God to draw me closer to Himself and be satisfied in Him alone. (Psalm 23 – you prepare a table in the presence of my enemies) As much as I would like God to stay within my comfort box, He won't.
- God won't be kept in a box. God will take us where we do not want to go, to complete in us that which we could never produce on our own. This is the journey from fear to faith, and it is a constant one in the life of every Christian.
- Open your Bibles with me to John 14:12-14. Here we get to observe first hand as Jesus takes His disciples from fear to faith.

### Read: John 14:12-14

**When I read these verses I am drawn to the famous words of William Carey: “Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God.”**

If you want a simple outline for this text, that would be it.

1. John 14:12 – Expect great things from God
2. John 14:13-14 – Attempt great things for God

Even though our focus this morning will be on the second, the first fuels the second. We will only attempt great things for God, if we expect great things from God.

The journey from fear to faith begins with fixing our eyes on God and what He has promised.

So be prepared to have the sides of your box blown open by what Jesus promises in verse 12. You can expect some awesome things from God.

- **“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me.”**

- This phrase appears multiple times throughout the gospel of John, each time referring to all Christians.
  - This promise is for all Christians!
  - This promise is NOT dependent on having enough faith or “just believing enough.” This is a positional belief that unites us with Christ. It refers to our salvation.
  - This promise is not just for the apostles, certain people with special gifts and talents, pastors, leaders, influential people. NO. It is for all Christians. Yes. For you and for me.
  - **“The works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do.”**
  - We will do greater works than Christ!?!?
  - What? What does that mean?
  - I don’t know.
  - But here is what I do know. It won’t be because of me. It won’t be because I have been trained or have special abilities. It won’t be because I am self-confident or courageous. It won’t be because of me.
  - Look at the end of the verse. “Because I go to the Father.” Notice that the explanation does not mention us at all! It’s all dependent upon Christ.
  - “Because I go to the Father.”
  - I love that Jesus takes what the disciples are most afraid of, and turns it into their greatest source of comfort and joy.
1. “Because I go to the Father” means that Christ has completed His saving work on the cross. Christ’s entire earthly ministry was looking forward to the cross. The cross was the very reason for which He came to this earth. There is a real sense in which Jesus’ life and works established the foundation, now we get to build upon it! We get to live out the fulfillment of the very reason Jesus came to this earth – to seek and save the lost! We are the ones that get to go to the ends of the earth and preach the gospel. ***So fix your eyes upon Jesus and in faith continue His mission to seek and save the lost! There is too much work to be done to sit back in fear. Christ has already prepared the way and guaranteed our success through His victory over sin and death at the cross.***
  2. “Because I go to the Father” means that Christ has a new Exalted Position. Matt. 28:18-20. All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples. ***So fix your eyes upon Jesus and in faith go with the authority of Christ and make disciples. Our message is too important to be silenced by the fear of man.***
  3. “Because I go to the Father” means that Christ has sent the gift of the Holy Spirit.
    - a. The Holy Spirit is another helper of the same kind. He too is God. (14:16)
    - b. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of Truth who will guide us into all truth.
    - c. The Holy Spirit will teach us all things; convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment; be the agent of regeneration; and will empower us to be witnesses for Christ in all the World.
    - d. Sometimes I think Jesus is a lot more excited about the Holy Spirit than we are! Jesus told His disciples that it was to their advantage that He go away, in order that He might send the Holy Spirit.
    - e. You only need to read the book of Acts to see the amazing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives! In Acts 2 after Peter preaches his first sermon, about 3,000 people believe in Jesus in one day! As far we can tell, more people got saved in that one day, than in Christ’s entire earthly ministry!

***So fix your eyes upon Jesus, and in faith be witnesses for Christ, knowing that the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives and the lives of those we speak to. Fear grows in the heart of those who think they are alone and must do everything on their own. We are never alone. The Holy Spirit dwells within us.***

When we begin to grasp the meaning of the phrase “Because I go to the Father,” we come to understand that the real comparison being made is not between Jesus works and our works, but ultimately between Jesus’ works while here on the earth, and Jesus’ works THROUGH US after He has ascended to the Father.

I believe that true greatness is not found in what we do, but in what Jesus has done and continues to do through us, sinful human beings saved by His marvelous grace. I think we can wrap our minds around how Jesus, the perfect, sinless, God-Man could perform miracles and preach. BUT can you wrap your mind around how someone like the Apostle Paul, could ever be used of God to preach the gospel and plant so many churches when he had hated God and actively opposed God?!

- Jesus has chosen to continue His plan of redemption through you and me, weak and frail and sinful as we are. I can’t ever get over that. 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 is so powerful. “For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God.”
- God wants to use us, but how? In faith I expect great things from God, but how do I attempt great things for God.
- **Through Prayer.**
- Prayer was top on Jesus’ priority list as He spent these last precious hours with His disciples. He kept coming back to it over and over again in John 14-16, and then ended with His own prayer in John 17.
  - o Jn. 14:13-14
  - o Jn. 15:7, 16
  - o Jn. 16:23-24

**Thesis: Through prayer, Christ gives us unlimited access to His unlimited resources in order that our lives might point people to Christ, and thereby glorify the Father.**

## I. The Scope of Prayer

- “Whatever you ask”
- There is no limitation here. Jesus wanted His disciples to know that they could come to Him for anything and everything that they might need. This would have been a huge encouragement to the disciples because they had left everything to follow Christ! They had no resources. They were completely dependent on Christ for everything, from their food even to money for their taxes! Now that Christ was leaving, what were they supposed to do? They were supposed to continue to ask Christ to supply their every need.
- Just in case they had any doubt about this, Jesus repeated Himself multiple times to be clear.
  - o 14:14 – “If you ask Me anything”
  - o 15:7 – “ask whatever you wish”
  - o 15:16 – “whatever you ask”
  - o 16:23 – “Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything”
- The same applies to you and me today. Like the apostle Paul, in Philippians 4:19, we can say with confidence, “And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”
- Christ has given us unlimited access to His unlimited resources, but we must ask. This leads us to a crucial question: **How must we ask?**

## II. The Condition of Prayer

- “Whatever you ask in My name.”
- Notice first of all that this is a request, not a demand. We are to ask. We are not to command Jesus to do anything. We are not to name it and claim it. We are not to feel entitled to anything because of how holy and obedient we consider ourselves to be. No! We are to humbly come before the throne of GRACE (getting what you don’t deserve) and ask.
- Notice second, that we are to ask in Jesus’ name. This is a great privilege. The disciples had walked with Jesus. They had witnessed His unlimited power and benefited from His unlimited resources. To be able to ask anything in Jesus name is a big deal. (Example of Peter healing the lame man in the name of Jesus in Acts. Contrast with the 7 sons of Sceva!) With great privilege, comes great responsibility. There is a lot packed into the simple phrase “in Jesus’ name.” Understanding the meaning of this phrase is at the very heart of whether or not our prayers will be heard and answered! It is the one major condition given! What then does it mean to ask in Jesus name?

**It means that prayer must be Dependent on Christ and in Agreement with Christ.**

1. Dependent on Christ

- a. It is the merits of Christ that enable our prayers, not our own.
- b. This is new! John 16:24 – “Until now you have asked for nothing in My name.” It is after the cross that we can ask in Jesus’ name. Now we approach the throne of grace based on the blood of Christ.
- c. When I hear people say, “I just don’t understand. I have been doing everything right. I have been living in obedience to Christ. I am faithful in going to church. I seek to use my gifts to build up the body of Christ. I try to help those who are in need. I just don’t understand why God doesn’t seem to answer my prayers.” That is praying on the basis of your own merits rather than Christ’s. While obedience to Christ is an essential part to prayer, it must not be the basis upon which you approach God. Our confidence must be in the righteousness of Christ, and in the blood which He shed for our redemption and purification.
- d. Hebrews 10:19-22 – “Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place **by the blood of Jesus**, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

2. In Agreement with Christ – His Character and His Will

***A. It is the Character of Christ that defines our prayers***

- a. Throughout Scripture, a person’s name refers to who he is, his character. Within the Gospel of John this can be seen in how believing in Jesus’s name and believing in Jesus are one and the same.
  - i. John 1:12 – But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.
  - ii. John 2:23 – Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing.
  - iii. John 3:16 – For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believe in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.
  - iv. John 6:40 – For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.
- b. Notice that the 2 are used interchangeably – “in His name” and “in Him.”

- c. Therefore, to pray in agreement with Jesus's name is to pray in agreement with Jesus Himself. It's as if your prayers are the same prayers that He would make. If your prayer involves something that is not consistent with Christ's Character, then Christ would not approve of that prayer and neither should you!
- d. To pray in the name of Jesus is truly a serious matter, not to be taken lightly. Sadly, we ask for so many things without regard for Christ, because we are seeking to please ourselves. May our prayers be grounded in the character of Christ! May they be prayers that He would approve of, that would delight His heart! May our prayers be Christ-centered, not self-centered.
- e. Sometimes I wonder what those first prayers were like. The disciples knew Christ! They were probably a lot more careful than we are today.
- f. I find it interesting that the rabbis would ask that God not hear the prayers of a traveler because he might pray for an easy journey with good weather and accommodating skies when people in that region actually needed rain for their crops! Far too many times we come to God with personal pronouns in our prayers...I, me, my. We tell God all about our problems and needs without thinking about others in the body of Christ. Oh, that we would be willing to sacrifice what seems to be best for ourselves because Christ is doing a greater work, and working out a greater plan that reaches way beyond our small little world.

***B. It is the will of Christ that drives our prayers.***

- a. To pray in Jesus's name not only means to pray in a way that is consistent with His character, but also according to His will. How, then, are we to know God's will?
- b. John 15:7 is helpful in this. While all the other passages in John 14-16 on prayer give the phrase "in Jesus's name" as the one condition, John 15:7 gives "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you" as the one condition. The two are certainly connected.
  - i. Abiding in Christ, at the very least, refers to being united with Christ and seeking to obey Him with our lives.
  - ii. Christ's words abiding in us, means that our lives must be saturated by the Word of God.
- c. Therefore, in order to pray in a way that is consistent with Christ's will, we must know the Scriptures and live in obedience to them. It is in the Scriptures that we learn what God's will is. Prayer, in this sense, is seeking to know God's will through Scripture and asking Him to fulfill it in our lives.

- When these conditions are met, we can pray with great confidence knowing that God will answer.

### **III. The Certainty of Prayer**

- I love this. "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do." Again in verse 14. "If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it."
- Jesus is ready, able, and eager to answer our prayers if they are dependent on Christ and in agreement with Christ, both His character and His will.
- We can pray with complete confidence, not wavering.

### **IV. The Purpose of Prayer**

- "So that the Father may be glorified in the Son."
- This is a reminder that we constantly need to hear. The purpose of prayer is not us. In fact, we aren't even mentioned in this phrase! It's all about the Glory of the Father.
- I think that many times we are so filled with the idea that prayer is getting something from God, that we forget prayer is actually a means by which God gets something from us! Glory! He receives glory!

- This is where we come full circle. Christ gives the amazing promise that we will do even greater works than the ones He did while on earth. These works are only possible because Christ has gone back to the Father. The means by which we will accomplish these works is prayer. The more our prayers focus on the character of Christ and the will of Christ, the more we will be effective in pointing others to Christ; and the more people come to Christ, the more glory the Father receives.
- **In summary, we could define prayer in this way: Prayer is the means by which God gives us what He wants, to accomplish His purposes, for His glory.**
- The beauty of this kind of prayer is death to self. Our focus is brought back to where it needs to be – on God. We move from fear to faith. And in faith we ask God to fulfill His amazing works through us for His glory.