

In Jesus' Name

Introduction

- “*Say What?*” - Taking a closer look at some of the most popular & misunderstood verses in scripture. Often the true meaning of these “*coffeecup Christianity verses*” gets lost, as we are so quick to apply them to our lives without first looking at the context.
- Our hope is, that through this series, we would get a fresh Biblical understanding of these timeless truths.
- Already covered -- Philippians 4:13, Jeremiah 29:11, Romans 8:28.
- But tonight I want to concentrate on what it means to pray in the name of Jesus.
- So, I expect many of us, including myself, close our prayers with something like “*in Jesus name we pray, Amen*”. Maybe you say it slightly differently, but the point is, many of us (once again, including myself) use a specific phrase to indicate that our prayers are in the name of Jesus.
- So tonight, I want to investigate where do we get this phrase from in scripture; the many misconceptions which we have surrounding this subject; and then, most importantly; what it truly means to pray, in Jesus' name.
- Is it just saying those three words, or is there more to it than that?

Greater Works

- [Personal Story \(learning how to pray\) -- watching parents pray, school prayers, being asked to pray at family Christmas event.](#)
- Where did you learn how to pray? Can you remember? Was it from a grandparent, parent, or friend? Perhaps you have never been

taught. If so, you're not alone. Everyone must begin somewhere, and this was true for Jesus' disciples as well.

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." (Luke 11:1)

- We're not told which disciple asked for guidance, but it doesn't really matter. They all needed to learn and it is interesting that even the followers of John the Baptist were eager to learn from John as well.
- But as Jesus taught his disciples about prayer throughout the course of His ministry, He taught them something very specific, that when they ask for things, they should ask the Father *"In my name."*
- But what does this really mean? Well instead of us just making something up that sounds nice, let's go to the place in scripture where Jesus said these words and study it in its original context. In other words, we don't want to put our meaning into the text but rather we want to draw the true meaning out of the text.
- These words by Jesus are found in John 14:12-14:

12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. 13 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 14:12-14)

- The background for this text is that Jesus is contextually speaking to His disciples at the Last Supper which was a rather long evening filled with drama, dialogue, teaching and prayer. It is here that Jesus makes some astonishing statements.
- So the first thing that Jesus promises His disciples is that whoever believes in Him will do the works that He does, but even more than that, they will actually do even greater things.

- Now that is a pretty crazy statement for Jesus to say when we read the kind of stuff that He did in scripture. Remember...storms obey His voice, He tells dead people they are not allowed to be dead anymore, He turns water into wine (and not box wine...the nice stuff!).
- But before we get too carried away; we have to realise that when Jesus says that we are going to do “*greater things*”, He isn’t talking about doing more amazing miracles. It’s not like we are going to beat Jesus on feeding five thousand people. “*Jesus you did it with 5 loaves, I can do it with two!*” No. That’s silly.
- But when He says “*you are going to do greater things*”, He is talking about the scope of our ministry. In other words, the amount of people that we are going to reach with the gospel. The transformation of not only a couple of individuals, but whole cultures and societies as the gospel goes out into all nations through the power of the Spirit.
- You know how we know this is true? ... We are here today -- Christians in Hawaii 2000 years later.
- For the last three years before He died, Jesus had been consistently sending His disciples out to tell other people about Himself -- but their effectiveness was pretty shaky at best.
- For example, they didn’t want to witness to people of different ethnic backgrounds (John 4), they were embarrassed and confused about the cross (Matthew 16), they couldn’t cast out demons, they caved in under pressure and denied him. But my absolute favourite example of their shaky evangelism was when James and John got so annoyed with some of the people that Jesus had sent them to reach, that they actually asked Jesus to send fire down from heaven to destroy them. Can you imagine that, getting so annoyed with the people they were meant to love that they asked Jesus to blow them up?! It’s fair to say that evangelism wasn’t their strong suit!

- But then Pentecost came. They received the Holy Spirit and everything changed.
- So in Peter's first sermon, over three thousand people were saved even though it was probably the most un-seeker sensitive sermon in history!!! Remember, this was Peter! More people were added through this sermon than in the entire ministry of Jesus where in the end of the day there were only 120 in the upper room.
- Then consistently throughout Acts, we see that the disciples were filled with such boldness that they were actually accused of turning the world upside down. In the next 50 years, the gospel spread to over 1 million people all over the Roman empire and beyond.
- So how did this happen?
- Did they change what they were saying? Did they start preaching some self-help sermons? No. Or maybe they started doing big events with bouncy castles and free food with an inoffensive 10 minute market-driven message that made people warm and fuzzy inside. NOOO
- They still preached the gospel. But the difference was the Holy Spirit. The Spirit which changes lives and convicts hearts, enabled them to have greater effectiveness on God's mission.

The Importance of Prayer

- Maybe you are like...what has this got to do with prayer? Well in this new era of greater ministry scope, Jesus offers His disciples some help.

13 *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 14:13-14)

- In other words, their powerful ministry is aided by answered prayer. Let me talk about prayer for a second:
- Prayer should be one of the most basic and foundational things of a Christian's life. If reading the Bible is like eating food then prayer is like breathing. I think we would all agree that to stay alive you need to breathe. Well, in the same way, prayer is essential for a Christian's life.
- Look, I find it way more difficult to hold my breathe under water than to normally breath above water. Why? Because breathing is our natural human condition. In the same way, when someone is born again, the most natural thing for them should be to communicate with our Creator and Saviour.
- Prayer is amazingly important for Christians. It's got tremendous power. I once heard someone say "*prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscles of omnipotence.*"
- In other words "prayer activates the power of God". That's putting the same thing in a simple term. Prayer activates the power of God. God moves in response to the prayers of his people.

Asking Anything In My Name

- But the text we have just read tells us, that the way which God moves through our prayers is when we ask "*in the name of Jesus*". When we ask in the name of Jesus, our prayers become effective.
- Now, apart from the text I have just read, there are many different other times in scriptures where we are told to do the same thing. Let me just give three examples:

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 15:16)

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.

24 Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. (John 16:23-24)

26 In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; (John 16:26)

- So, it is clear throughout scripture that the key to effective prayers is found in praying in the name of Jesus. That's clear. But that doesn't mean we know what in the world this means! So...before I go there, I first want to address what it doesn't mean.

What this doesn't mean

- So normally when we think about praying in the name of Jesus, we think, straight away about saying those three words “in Jesus name” at the end of our prayers.
- But the problem with this understanding, is that there is not one example of a prayer found in scripture which does this:
 - We don't see it in the Lord's prayer
 - We don't see it when the early church prayed in the Book of Acts
 - We don't see it in any of the closing prayers at the end of the epistles
 - We don't see it in the two great prayers in the book of Ephesians
- It's just not there. You won't find it.
- Too often, people say “in Jesus name” as they think that is almost the magic formula to getting their prayers heard. It is like that extra boost.
- But hear me, you can't force God's hand with the words you use. There is no such thing as a mechanical formula for God doing what we want. That is turning Biblical spirituality into pagan superstition.

It is a false idea to think we can get God to do what we want as long as we say a certain phrase.

- God is not Aladdin's genie, that if you rub the lamp the right way, He will come up and give you whatever you wish! No, the God of the Bible doesn't work like that.
- So, here is where we are at. We are clearly called to pray in the name of Jesus. That is clear. But we have just established that praying in the name of Jesus doesn't mean ending your prayers with the phrase "*in the name of Jesus.*" Why? Because we don't see that in scripture.
- So if praying in Jesus name is not simply saying some magic words, what does it mean?

The Biblical Importance of Names

- For us to answer this question, we have to first understand the biblical importance of names.
- See, the concept of a name in scripture involved much more than a tag that identifies the person and distinguishes him or her from other people. Although it does do that, it also has a much deeper meaning.
- You see, names in scripture represent the very essence of a person. In other words, a person's personality, character, reputation and authority are all wrapped up in their name.
- Let me give some examples of this:

*A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,
and favor is better than silver or gold. (Proverbs 22:1)*

*A good name is better than precious ointment,
and the day of death than the day of birth. (Ecclesiastes 7:1)*

- In these verses you will notice the extraordinary value of a good name. Besides a person's soul, this is the most important

possession a person has, because it represents the very essence of who they are. Everything which they stand for, is wrapped up in their name.

- So...with that cultural foundation in mind. The name of Jesus is not just a simple title, but a way to summarise His whole personhood.
- So when we pray “*in His name*”, it means that we are praying in a manner which is consistent with who Christ is, what He taught and all that He stood for. In other words, we are representing Jesus in our communion with God.

- What I want to do now...is to unpack this for you and expand three main ways in which we represent Jesus when we pray. So when we pray we are:
 1. Approaching God in the authority of Jesus,
 2. Approaching God with the desires of Jesus,
 3. Approaching God trusting the sovereign wisdom of Jesus.

1. Approaching God In The Authority of Jesus

- The Bible is clear that God is Holy. Humanity is sinful. No way that sinful man can approach a Holy God and live.
- For example, that weird OT story of Uzzah and the ark of the covenant. Ark was being transported by an oxen, it stumbled, so Uzzah put out his hand to stop it falling to the ground. In response, God kills Uzzah. This story is ultimately about what happens when sinful man tries to touch the presence of God on their own merit -- death.
- In the OT, the high priest was the mediator between a Holy God and sinful man. Once a year the High Priest was to enter the Holy of Holies and offer sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people. The problem was that the high priests were sinful themselves, so had to

constantly offer their own sacrifices. But this was meant to be a picture or shadow of what Christ would achieved for us.

- Jesus is our greater high priest. Unlike the other high priests, He is perfect and so He mediates the gap between us and God. Then he offers the perfect sacrifice, not a lamb, but Himself, who is the ultimate lamb of God, for our sins.

5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

- The only way that we can approach God is through trusting in the atoning payment of Christ, in trusting in the mediator.
- For a Christian, our life is hidden in Christ's life. It is not about us. It is about Him. It is about His perfect life of obedience, it is about His substitutionary death, it is about His glorious resurrection.
- What this means for our prayer life is that when we pray, we pray with the knowledge that our only right in approaching the Father is through Jesus. It is the acknowledgment that we are totally unworthy of receiving anything from God and that the only reason God should grant our request is that you come in the authority of Jesus.
- It is only through Christ that we can walk into the throne of grace in boldness and that we can find grace and help in times of need (Hebrews 4:16)
- We pray not in our own merit, but in the merit of Jesus.
- Remind yourself of the gospel- but important not in your failings but in your success.
- Sometimes I even spell this out at the beginning of my prayers. For example:

“Father, I come before you, not in my own power, not in my own righteousness, not in my own capability. I come before you in the authority of Jesus, your Son, who gave me access in this faith in which I stand because of His blood. I come on the merits of Jesus, not on my own merits.”

Approaching God With The Desires of Jesus

- What this means is that our prayers reflect Jesus’ own values and purposes. We see the world the way that Christ sees the world and are completely sold out for His agenda...not ours.
- We see this explicitly laid out in the following scripture:

14 And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. (1 John 5:14)

- See, we are to pray according to His Will.
- But how do we know His Will? how do we have the same desires of Jesus?
- There is only one way -- having our lives shaped by the holy scriptures.
- Definition -- *“Prayer is continuing a conversation with God which He has already started”* (Tim Keller)
- Prayer doesn’t start with us speaking -- it starts with us listening to what God has already spoken.
- Principle -- We don’t speak until we are first spoken to.
 - Law of Nature -- Babies learn to speak from parents
 - Story of God -- Word of God creates people of God
- Word of God needs to come first

- Danger of praying without first listening to what God has already spoken:
 - God becomes whoever we want Him to be
 - We ask whatever we want not what God wants
- George Whitfield example- Thought son was going to become great preacher, called him John (after John the Baptist), baptised him when he was born, taught his congregation about the powerful preaching ministry he was going to have. Son died of a seizure at 4 months old- danger of trusting your intuition instead of Word of God
- Need to take every thought captive. Let Word of God renew your mind.
- Prayer is in response to God first speaking to us.
- Can you pray without reading? Absolutely! However our prayer life is like a sponge -- the longer we are away from the Living Water of Life, the dryer it becomes.
- When we pray, God will answer our prayers when we approach Him with the desires of Jesus and we find them out through reading His Word. Jesus' ultimate desire for your life is not your happiness but your holiness.

Approaching God Trusting The Sovereign Wisdom of Jesus

- Look, there are a lot of Godly things which we all want. Give examples- salvation, healing, relationship breakthroughs
- But ultimately, we have to trust in the Sovereign hand of God. We have to pray like Jesus who said, "Your Will Be Done."

*The heart of man plans his way,
but the Lord establishes his steps. (Proverbs 16:9)*

- Trusting in the sovereignty of God is a warm blanket to the soul in the darkest nights of the soul. The knowledge and trust that God is in absolute control of everything in your life, even the hard things; the trust that what man uses for evil, God uses for good.
- Look, you don't have to understand what is going on, but you trust that God does -- that He is in absolute control of everything.
- When we pray, we have to approach God trusting the sovereign wisdom of Jesus. In other words, practically, if He doesn't give us what we want, we are ok with it, and can proclaim "*your will be done.*"

So, just to recap. To pray in Jesus' name means three things:

1. Approaching God in the authority of Jesus,
 2. Approaching God with the desires of Jesus,
 3. Approaching God trusting the sovereign wisdom of Jesus.
- All of our requests have to be filtered through the authority, desire, and sovereignty of Jesus. Once again, praying in the name of Jesus is about everything which Jesus stood for -- not just saying three words at the end of our prayer.

Reasons to say 'In Jesus' Name Amen'

- Now... having biblically clarified what it means to pray in Jesus' name, if you are doing all of these things -- if your heart is in the right place, if you are praying in the authority, desires and sovereignty of Jesus -- if all that is true, I believe there is great wisdom in ending your public prayers by explicitly saying "*in Jesus name, amen*" even though it is not required or modelled in scripture. Here is why:

- When you pray publicly, it reminds everyone that you are specifically praying to Jesus. When you pray, you should want everyone to know that a Christian is not simply someone who believes in God. As there are lots of so called gods, like Allah.
- But we want to make it crystal clear that a Christian is a person who believes that Jesus is the the way, the truth and the life and that there is no way that you can get to the Father except through Him. So to pray out loud in Jesus' name, is a public statement that I am following Jesus, which is radically different from a person who simply believes in God.
- I read a story in a book recently which troubled me. That a couple of years ago there was this meeting which got together the Muslims and Christians in a particular city to discuss how they could improve the area which they lived in. Anyway, at the beginning of their meeting, there was a time of worship where both the Christians and Muslims sang a song by Chris Tomlin called '*God of This City*' together. So both of these groups were singing this song, but because the song doesn't mention Jesus or the gospel, just the '*God of this city*' they could both sing it alongside each other to their different gods. As I thought about this, I thought about how strange this is.
- We've got to be clear, not only in our preaching but also in our songs and prayers of the gospel of Christ. We have to make Jesus...explicit. We can't be ashamed of the gospel as it is the power of God to those who will believe. So there is wisdom in clearly communicating outloud the name of Jesus, as a public statement that we follow him alone.
- In all my public prayers, I try to say, "*in Jesus' name.*" However, at the same time, I know that the phrase means nothing without the heart attitude of "*I am nothing without the authority and power of Jesus Christ. So my life is hidden in His.*"

Conclusion

- So as we close this evening, praying in Jesus' name is not a magical way of getting your way with God. This is simply a reminder that the right we have to approach God is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The authority we have to ask requests from God is in light of the risen Christ.
- So tonight, may we have the heart attitude of humility and trust in our prayer life. May we constantly look to Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith. May we constantly throw our lives down upon Him.