

## **“Praying in the Name of Jesus”**

Date: May 4, 2014

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Luke 11:1-13; John 14:9-14 Theme: Prayer

Occasion: series on prayer

This morning, I’m beginning a sermon series about prayer. Prayer is the spiritual oxygen that Christians breathe. Prayer is the fastest wireless communication system in the universe. Prayer is the intimate connection between us and God.

Prayer is not difficult, though we sometimes make it out to be. In these next few weeks I hope to share some insights and suggestions that will inspire us to pray more often. And I hope to clarify some of the mistaken notions we might have about prayer.

Today I want to address the question, “What does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus?” First, let me tell you what it’s not. To pray in the name of Jesus is not a secret code word that makes our prayers more effective than anyone else’s.

Too often we confuse prayer with magic. Magic is an attempt to manipulate supernatural powers so we can get what we want. But that’s not what prayer is. We’re not trying to manipulate God into giving us what we want. Prayer is spiritual surrender, so that we can become instruments of God’s divine will.

So, when we pray 'in Jesus' name' we are saying that what we ask for is within the spirit of Jesus. We're putting our thoughts through the mind of Christ, so that our intentions will be as pure as they can be.

When we pray in Christ's holy name, we are telling God that we have compared this prayer with the spirit of Jesus. And we bring it to God, believing that this is the truest prayer we can offer. Therefore, when we pray in the name of Jesus, we can't ask for some forbidden person or thing.

We can't be asking for some personal ambition of ours, if it means that someone must be hurt to fulfill it. When you pray in the name of Jesus, you can't be asking for something that Scripture clearly tells us is wrong.

We cannot pray in the name of Him who is love, for instance, to exact vengeance on our enemies. Whenever we pray in Jesus' name, we need to be asking ourselves if this is something that Jesus would desire.

In other words, the prayer that Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane must become our prayer: "Thy will not mine be done."

First of all, we need to realize that we are not God. We don't know better than God. Therefore we need to submit our requests to the One who knows all things.

The essence of prayer is not that we say to God, "Thy will be changed." Rather, we say, "Thy will be done." More

often than not, our prayers should not be that God would send us the things we wish, but that God would make us able to accept the things He wills.

So, when we pray in the name of Jesus, we don't have a secret code word that will cause God to automatically give us what we ask for. It's not magic. It is asking that our thoughts, our hopes, our dreams, our desires, would align with the mind of Christ.

Prayer, then, changes us. I have a few Scripture passages that I'd like for us to think about, because I think that Scripture is pointing us in *one* direction, about who we are to be - and thus how we are to pray.

The first one is Philippians 2:5: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." (NIV) The NRSV says it this way: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." We need to begin to think, and thus to pray, like Jesus.

The second one is Galatians 2:20. It says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." We die to the old self, our old ideas, our old attitudes. And Christ begins to live in us - His ideas, his attitudes, his way of thinking begin to transform who we are.

The third passage is Romans 12:2: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test

and approve what is God's will - his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Finally, Galatians 3:27: "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." In other words, we take off the old garments of our former, sinful self, and we put on the clothes of righteousness.

We think, we act and we pray in the manner of Jesus. When we pray in the name of Jesus, we are putting our thoughts through the filter of Jesus Christ. Are we seeking the things that Jesus would desire?

But there is one more thing we need to remember. When our wills align with God's will, and we're praying in the spirit of Jesus, there is power in that name.

Philippians 2:9 says, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every other name." The name above all names! Peter and John were going up the temple steps at the hour of prayer, over in the book of Acts. They come upon a man who cannot walk, begging for alms.

Peter says to him, "I have no silver or gold, but I give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!" And the lame man walked.

To pray in the name of Jesus is to align ourselves with the will of God. When we are in agreement with God's will,

we can pray and believe that our prayers are heard. We can expect answers. That is what faith is all about.

But we dare not believe that simply saying the name of “Jesus” will guarantee we get everything we ask for. We still conclude our prayers by saying, “Not my will, but yours be done.” But then, having put our prayers through the filter of Jesus Christ, we can have confidence that God hears and answers. Amen? Amen!