

165. The Gospel of John—16:23-24

“The Joy of Answered Prayer”

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

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As most of you already know—my style of teaching is to go through the Bible verse by verse which allows me to give you the—“*whole counsel of God*” (Acts 20:27). This is called ‘*expositional teaching*’—which is different from ‘*topical teaching*.’

I have nothing against topical teaching—as long as a teacher doesn’t ‘yank’ the verse or verses out of its context and treat it like a ‘standalone’ passage. When teachers engage in ‘passage harvesting’ where they remove a verse or passage from its context to treat it as if it is the only verse or group of verses on the page—it leads to eisegesis instead of good solid exegesis.

This morning I’d like to present a topical teaching—but a topical teaching that comes from our expositional study of John’s Gospel.

Let’s read the passage I’d like to teach topically—

John 16:23-24 (NKJV)

²³ **And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.** ²⁴ **Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.**

I’m calling this topical message “*The Joy of Answered Prayer*”

I. The Context

“...in that day you will ask Me nothing.” (verse 23)

In what day?—**in the day Jesus returns to His Father after His death and resurrection.**

The context for that statement started in the upper room while Jesus and His disciples were observing the Passover together—

John 13:33 (NKJV)

³³ Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you.

John 14:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ² In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were not so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

John 14:16-17 (NKJV)

"...¹⁶ And [once I return to My Father in heaven] I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever--¹⁷ the Spirit of truth...

John 16:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ "A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father."

John 16:23 (NKJV)

²³ And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.

So, the context of verses 23-24 of John 16 is that Jesus is going to be returning to His Father in heaven soon—which means, He will soon be turning the work of the Kingdom over to them.

For the last 3 ½ years, Jesus had been with them **physically** and whatever questions they had in understanding the work of building God’s Kingdom on the earth—they simply asked Jesus and He answered those questions. Also, if they had any needs for the work of the Kingdom (remember, He sent them out two by two to preach the Gospel)—again, they simply brought their requests to Jesus, and He would take those requests to the Father in prayer.

The Father would then provide them with anything they needed in spreading the Gospel and building the Kingdom. However, **soon Jesus would no longer be with them physically (bodily)**—which meant they would no longer be able to ask Him any questions or bring to Him their Kingdom requests.

- Now, did that mean that they would no longer have anyone to whom they could go to with their questions and problems?

No, Jesus is telling them that ‘in that day’ they could take these things directly to the Father in prayer themselves—they wouldn’t have to go through Jesus!

So, as you can see, in these two verses (John 16:23-24) the context is that Jesus is making a **promise** to His disciples that if they pray directly to the Father their prayers would be answered—however, there is a condition.

REFLECTION: What does Jesus mean when he said: “in that day you will ask me nothing”?

II. The Condition

John 16:23 (NKJV)

²³ And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, **whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.**

John 14:13-14 (NKJV)

¹³ And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

This statement seems like an incredible thing for Jesus to have promised us as His disciples—how are we to understand it?

There are many Christians who have been taught that this promise is a **'blank check'** just waiting for us to **'fill in the amount' and 'cash' it by faith.**
So, no matter what it is—a new car, new house, wealth, health—whatever you desire **all you have to do is ask for it in Jesus' name and He will give it to you**—it's an 'ironclad' promise!

If you don't get what you've asked for (if you're not healed or prospered)—it's because of a lack of faith on your part! But, to properly understand what Jesus is really saying in John 14:13-14 (and John 16:23)—we need to understand 2 things.

REFLECTION: Define the condition Jesus establishes for prayers?

A. To whom was Jesus speaking when He gave this promise?

Remember context is everything when it comes to properly interpreting anything in God's Word—especially when it comes to a promise He has given. So once again, to whom was Jesus speaking when He gave this promise that **"whatever you ask in My name, that I will do"**—was He giving this promise to the *multitudes*—No, **He was talking to His disciples the night before His crucifixion.**

Earlier in His ministry, Jesus had laid out the cost of being one of His disciples—*"If anyone desires to come after Me [be My disciple], let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."* (Matthew 16:24)

1. Deny yourself

The idea is to **deny yourself your goals and desires to live for God's glory and the building of His Kingdom.** Being a disciple of Christ is a **life of self-denial and service to Jesus as our King.**

This means we must abandon all **selfish desires and goals** that seek only to 'use' God to get what our flesh desires (*"the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life"* (1John 2:16)—to live the life that Jesus lived—**"I always (and only) do the things that please My Father in heaven."** (John 8:29)

In other words, a true disciple isn't going to be seeking after personal riches—his or her prayers will be for the glory of God and not for the glory of self.

2. Take up your cross

The cross was a symbol of death.

To take up one's cross not only means to die to self— it also means to be willing to pay any price for Christ's sake. It is the willingness to endure shame, embarrassment, reproach, rejection, persecution— even martyrdom for His sake.

The Cross represents the suffering that will be ours because of our relationship to Christ.

One pastor put it well—

“Christ does not call disciples to Himself to make their lives easy and prosperous, but to make them holy and productive. Willingness to take up his cross is the mark of the true disciple.

As the hymnist wrote, “Must Jesus bear the cross alone, and all the world go free? No, there's a cross for everyone, and there's a cross for me.” Those who make initial confessions of their desire to follow Jesus Christ, but refuse to accept hardship or persecution, are characterized as the false, fruitless souls who are like rocky soil with no depth. They wither and die under threat of the reproach of Christ (Matthew 13:20–21).

Many people want a “no-cost” discipleship, but Christ offers no such option.”

3. Follow Jesus

Matthew 16:24 (NKJV)

²⁴ Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

True discipleship is following in the steps of Jesus, living the life that He lived.

“I haven't come to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me”; “I haven't come to be served but to serve and to give My life a ransom for many.”

—Jesus

1 John 2:6 (NKJV)

⁶ He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

John 10:27 (NKJV)

²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

Jesus' whole life was wrapped up in glorifying His Father through obedience and manifesting His character to the people of the world. A true disciple of Jesus will have the same passionate desire to glorify God through obedience and manifesting His character (primarily His love) to this world.

Believe me—selfishness and carnality are not qualities of those who *are* following Jesus—but of those who are following their fleshly desires instead. A life of selfish, carnal desires which then get translated into prayer in the name of faith—is not the kind of person Jesus made this promise to.

REFLECTION: In these passages (listed above) Jesus is talking to His disciples; What are the costs of discipleship?

B. What does it mean to ask for things in Jesus' name?

John 14:13-14 (NKJV)

¹³ And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

John 16:23 (NKJV)

²³ And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.

>>> Asking “in Jesus' name” is not some kind of magic phrase that ‘energizes’ our prayers and guarantees that whatever came before those ‘magic words’ it will be answered—

>>> **No matter how selfish and outlandish the request**—it now must be honored and answered by God because we stuck “in Jesus' name” at the end of our prayer—**that's ridiculous!**

In the Jewish mind, to ask for something in someone else's name meant to ask for something as their **representative**—something they would have asked for if they had been there in person. It would be something that was in harmony with their character and personality—for in the Jewish mind the concept of “name” speaks of ‘*all that they are as a person*’—their nature.

Moses asked God “*Tell me Your name*”—and God responded by telling Moses His nature: “*My name is: merciful, gracious, long-suffering, abounding in goodness and truth...*” (Exodus 34:6-7).

**To ask for something in Jesus' name means
I'm asking for things that are consistent with His nature and character.**

It means, **I'm standing in His place and asking for what He would have asked for if He was here physically on the earth**—especially when it comes to the work of God's Kingdom—

“Father, I'm asking this on behalf of Jesus because I know He would have wanted this. I know this because it is consistent with His character and what He was most passionate about during His earthly ministry (His Father's glory and the salvation of lost sinners—Luke 19:10).”

In other words, if Jesus wouldn't have asked for it—we'd better not either! One thing we know for sure—Jesus would never have asked His Father for material wealth for Himself!

We are Jesus' representatives doing His business and building His Kingdom here on earth—and whatever we need to accomplish His work we are to ask the Father for in His name and He (Jesus) promised He would make sure we got whatever we needed to do the work He commissioned us to do.

That in essence is the interpretation of the statement of asking the Father for anything in Jesus' name—the context is for the work of building God's Kingdom upon the earth. It **was not** a promise that we could be carnal and selfish and ask God for fancy cars and palatial mansions and other material things and He would have to fulfill our requests—because we asked Him *"in Jesus' name"*!

Remember that prayer in Jesus' name is always for the glory of God—and we know that Jesus always prayed for things that glorified His Father

John 14:13 (NKJV)

¹³ **And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.**

- *"So, then what you're saying is that I can't pray for myself—for my needs?"*
- No, that's not what I'm saying since when God provides for His children—He is glorified! (Matthew 6:31-33)

It's just that we must understand that to ask for something in Jesus' name means to pray for something that He Himself would have prayed for if He were physically present—something that is consistent with His character and would glorify His Father.

It is easy then to understand that anything we ask for (especially when it comes to the work of God's Kingdom)—will be given to us!

One author said it well—

*"God wants to use us as His instruments on the earth to show His power through by being a witness to bring others to Christ. This is all tied in with prayer—**Christ centered prayer**. Prayer for the glory of God from the heart of a disciple whose heart breaks to see a world lost and on its way to destruction—a world taking glory away from God. That kind of prayer will be answered—the kind that brings glory to God not to self with carnal selfish prayers. So many people have gotten caught up in this teaching—God help us to understand what it means to truly follow Jesus Who was (and is) so selfless and other's centered."*

REFLECTION: What does it mean to you to pray consistent with God's nature and character?

III. The Consequence

John 16:23-24 (NKJV)

²³ And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. ²⁴ **Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.**

There is *nothing* that brings a Christian greater joy than answered prayer!

Part of that joy comes from the realization that God is listening to our prayers—that we are important to Him, and He desires to answer our prayers—in part to show us He cares about us.

>>> Understand, the greatest reason Christians don't get what they need from God in a given situation is because—they often simply don't bother to ask God to supply their need! As James put it—"you do not have because you do not ask." (James 4:2b)

There are many carnal Christians that don't even think to ask God for help or to provide their needs—primarily because they're very self-sufficient and/or they really don't think prayer will accomplish anything—so why bother...

But for the vast majority of Christians, **we believe prayer is powerful**, we have seen prayer work incredible things in the lives of others—but we just don't believe it will have any effect in my life—why?

Often because we have allowed the devil to convince us that we aren't worthy of God's blessings or help—"I'm such a carnal loser who keeps blowing it and making dumb mistakes why would God want to answer my prayers?"

➤ Why? Because God is gracious, and the definition of grace is "getting from God what we don't deserve".

Everything we receive from God is a gift of grace and in fact if you think you deserve anything from God or even worse—that God owes you for being such a wonderful person—He won't answer your prayers.

➤ "Yes, but I've tried to pray consistently—I keep failing miserably, so I've just given up."

A strong prayer life is just as much a gift of God's grace as any other work or discipline in the Christian life—even as Jesus said, "**Apart from Me you can do nothing**".

To everyone here who wants to pray but finds no strength let me read you a quote from Andrew Murray's book, *Living a Prayerful Life*:

"Many a person has turned to his place of prayer under bitter self-accusation that he has prayed so little, and he has resolved for the future to live in a different manner. Yet no blessing has come—there has not been the strength to continue faithful, and the call to repentance has had no power because his eyes were not fixed on the Lord Jesus. If he had only understood, he would have said, "Lord, you see how cold and dark my heart is. I know that I must pray, but I feel I cannot do so. I lack the urgency and desire to pray."

He did not know that at that same moment the Lord Jesus in His tender love was looking down upon him and saying, "You cannot pray. You feel that all is cold and dark. Why not give yourself over into my hands? Only believe that I am ready to help you in prayer.

I long to pour my love into your heart so that you, in the consciousness of weakness, may confidently rely on me to bestow the grace of prayer. Just as I will cleanse you from all other sins, so also will I deliver you from the sin of prayerlessness—only do not seek the victory in your own strength. Bow before me as one who expects everything from his Savior. Let your soul keep silence before me, however lame you feel your state is. Be assured of this: I will teach you how to pray."

Yet, James went on to say that even when Christians do pray for something they often still don't have their request answered by God because of selfishness—

James 4:3 (NLT2)

And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

When it comes to answered prayer—sometimes God says 'no'. (Am I glad He didn't give me some of the things I prayed for!—Sometimes there is joy in unanswered prayer too!!)

Sometimes we don't have our prayers answered because—we give up and stop praying before the timing of God comes to answer our prayers. (Ecclesiastes 3:1; Daniel 10)

Remember what Jesus told us with regard to answered prayer—

Matthew 7:7-8 (NLT2)

⁷ “Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Persistence in prayer is very important if we want our prayers to be answered by God—especially when it comes to praying for unsaved loved ones!—

Luke 18:1 (NKJV)

¹ Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,

So, when it comes to answered prayer—sometimes God says “no”, sometimes He says, “not yet”—but often He says “yes”—which brings great joy into our hearts to see God answer our prayer.

REFLECTION: Take a moment to reflect on your personal prayer life and habits and rate yourself. What are your prayer strengths and weaknesses?

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

Want to know more? Click [here](#).