Section: Stand Alone, Prayer Night

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

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**TEACHING NOTES**

Welcome.

First, let’s pray.

Tonight Scott and I are sharing the midweek lesson and our focus is a night of prayer. Recently in another midweek lesson I had a passage that I wanted to spend more time unpacking in regard to prayer but it did not fit into my lesson. So tonight I want to begin our time by looking closely at the particular passage and unpacking a few truths from it for your consideration.

*“In Jesus’ name, AMEN.”* Quite a common phrase, right? It’s likely that many or most of you end most of your formal prayers with that phrase. But, have you considered what God’s word says about this? Do you know that that specific way of ending a prayer is not modeled in Scripture. Even when Jesus taught how to pray, He did not include that specific phrase. So, tonight I want to focus on this a bit.

There are occasions in the New Testament, that speak to asking God *in the name of Jesus*. For example, we’ll look at a main one in this lesson.

What we need to consider is,

-What is that talking about? (passages the speak to asking God *in the name of Jesus)*

and

-Is the common phrase “*In Jesus’ name, AMEN*” needed? Is it Okay? Is it the exclusive way to end a Christian prayer?

and

-How should a Christian end a prayer?

Open your bibles to the gospel of John 14. My lesson will be shorter than a normal midweek lesson so I intend to focus in primarily on vs. 12-14 of this passage, but we have some much needed context to see so we’ll begin at verse 1. Let’s read the whole section then I will break it down.

**John 14:1-14 1“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4And you know the way to where I am going.” 5Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” 6Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”**

**8Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” 9Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.**

**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. 13Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.**

**Context:**

Context is very important when it comes to the scriptures. The gospel John is writing is a historical recount/recalling of what took place in Jesus’ life and ministry. So when we see John share these details that would otherwise be unknown to those who weren’t present we have to consider that context. We’ve shared this truth with you many times but it bears repeating here as we see a good example of how missed context can lead to a very false understanding of what Jesus declares in this passage.

Before we dig into the passage just let me say if you end your prayer with the phrase “*In Jesus’ name, AMEN”*, there’s nothing about that phrase that is wrong or bad with it. Personally, I tend to go back and forth with how I end my prayers. I say that phrase at times. But what I do and you do, need to be based on a right understanding of God’s word. Just because I use that phrase sometimes doesn’t mean it’s automatically okay. We need to make sure it’s biblical. And we need to make sure what we mean by our words is biblical. One of the purposes behind addressing this is to remove an unfortunate myth that some believe, maybe some of you, which is that by using the name of our Lord to end your prayer you are somehow assured that what you prayed for must be given.

Let me say it this way, I’ve declared to you all in many lessons that when God promises something it is as good as Him actually doing it. God cannot break His promise just as He cannot lie. So what do we do when we see a verse that on the surface seems to declare if we simply use the name of Jesus we should get whatever we ask for in that prayer? Many of you know that this simply isn’t the case but how many times have you heard people make the claim that if you say the right words or have enough faith, your prayers would be answered. This simply is not a biblical view of prayer and Scott spoke well to this on his recent lesson for midweek.

That being said how are we to understand a passage like this one found in John 14? Well as I said, we really need to understand the context of the verse properly. This really helps us to clear up confusion. We’ve already read from the beginning of John 14 so now I just want to summarize what was being said and read verse 11-14 of John 14.

Before I do that remember the context of the previous verses. Jesus is about to be crucified, as He explains this to His disciples they become very disheartened. Can you imagine what must be going through the minds of the Disciples of Christ in this moment? Their entire worlds have been turned upside down by the one whom they declare to be the long awaited Messiah. But this reality that Jesus unpacks for them that He will be leaving them is too much for them to bear. They have witnessed Jesus raise people from the dead, heal all sorts of illnesses, cast out demons, turn water into wine, and give sight to the blind. They have seen Christ reveal in the greatest measure the realities of the invisible God in human flesh. We see this when Jesus declares if you know me you know the Father and you have seen Him in me.

But now Jesus tells them that He has to go. Considering that the disciples were eyewitnesses to these miracles perhaps now you can understand why it was hard for them to believe that Jesus would have to suffer and die.

In the final verses of John chapter 13, Jesus had just finished telling Peter that Peter would betray Him. He then turns to His disciples and tells them “Let not your hearts be troubled!” He begins to unpack what it means for Him to return to the Father and how the Holy Spirit will be sent in a very special way to His Apostles.

However even amongst these realities they have doubts and confusion. Philip declares if you just show us the Father we will get it and Jesus responds I am in the Father and the Father is in me. You’ve seen the Father because I’ve revealed Him to you (if you’ve seen Me you’ve seen the Father). Jesus says believe My words or else believe on account of the works I’ve done. This is where we pick up in verse 11.

**John 14:11 11Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.**

Jesus does this often, He points to the works He has done to prove that He is who He claimed to be. In the old testament there are many prophecies of the Messiah and many foreshadows or types that reveal who Christ would be and what He would do. Because of this He often points back to those works as a way of proving He is the fulfillment of those prophecies. Now keep that understanding in mind because what He is about to say specifically to His disciples/apostles, not to all future believers, falls right in line with this understanding that the works being done by these apostles who were being sent out into the world to spread the gospel will prove that they have the authority of God to speak on His behalf. This is where we pick up in verse 12.

**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. 13Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”**

Who is the YOU in view here? "Whatever YOU ask in my name" & "If YOU ask" …who is the YOU? It may be the immediate audience and those who come after them, or it could be specific people. That’s what we will consider for this passage.

What you should see from our study is that this is not a promise for all believers in all places for all times. The “YOU” in this section is speaking of a certain group of people, for a specific reason.

Context is simply crucial to have a right understanding of this verse. The context we see in these verses reveal to us a handful of things that help us rightly understand that this passage is not meaning anyone in anytime that believes and asks in Jesus’ name means that Jesus will do what they ask.

First, see that the men being spoken to here were Jesus’ disciples. This was not a general call to everyone. It’s important to see the direct audience and consider that because we also know that they were struggling to understand that Jesus was going to leave them they began having doubts. In fact here in this passage they were clearly doubting what Jesus was telling them even to the point of saying show us the Father and let us see with our own eyes then we will believe.

**8Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” 9Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.**

Jesus declares to Phillip that the words He is telling them are from the Father and that Jesus’ has revealed the Father to them through Himself. Jesus is declaring to His disciples (Philip one of the 12) that they should believe what He is saying as if the Father was standing there (anthropomorphically speaking) telling them those very words. And if they struggle to believe Christ’s words then consider the works He has already done to prove that He is speaking on behalf of the Father.

Secondly the disciples were clearly struggling with belief in what Jesus was telling them so Jesus emphasizes this point by saying in verse 12 TRULY TRULY I tell you whoever believes in me, or more properly whoever among you “is believing” in me you will also do the works I’ve done that prove I am from the Father and speaking with the Fathers authority. In fact Jesus declares that by His going to the Father those there (namely His disciples) would do greater things because of what He had just revealed to them about departing from them to go to the Father.

So consider this, many of us here in this room have genuine faith in Jesus, we are believing into Him, but we do not do the literal works that Jesus did like we see His disciples do throughout the book of Acts when they are sent out into the world to spread the gospel. This is not because we don’t have genuine faith, rather the context of these passages show that this was for a specific group of people who believed, namely Christ’s apostles and for a specific purpose, to spread the gospel to the world and to write the scriptures we now have in the New Testament. They were about to take up the mantle of what Christ had begun and carry it out to the whole world.

The Apostles were able to prove the authority Christ gave them by doing the things Christ did through their prayer and dependency on Christ and His finished work. We have a lesson about the Apostles and their role and gifts coming in April, in which you will further see the unique promises made to them and acts that God did through them.

We know Jesus is clearly not saying that these men would have more power than Christ or that the things they would do would be based in their own power, rather Jesus was saying that as He goes back to the Father He was specifically sending these men out with a special pouring out of the Holy Spirit that would give them the ability to do the miraculous works Christ did but on a larger scale, since there were more of them and since it was now time for spreading the gospel *throughout the world*. The work that Christ did in healing and proving who He was and what He came to do was quite limited geographically during His earthy ministry. However the continued work that He gave to the Apostles to do is the beginning of how we have the gospel and the Word of God today here in America. It was a much wider scope that was being affected.

Now clearly I do not mean that Christ failed or was unable to do these things but as we know God is specific in His purposes and actions. It is clear that God had not intended to consummate all things at Christ’s resurrection. He had another plan and it was fulfilled completely and perfectly in Christ and is now being filled in His timing and will be completed at His own chosen time.

The increased worldwide spread of the gospel was meant to be done by his disciples and what we see going on in this passage is Christ confirming for a specific group of disciples that they have amazing ability in their unique role .

John Gil declares this about these particular verses:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me,.... Having mentioned his miracles as proofs of his deity, he assures his disciples, in order to comfort them under the loss of his bodily presence, that they should do the same, and greater works; for we are not to understand these words of everyone that believes in Christ, of every private believer in him, but only of the apostles, and each of them, that were true believers in him: to whom he says,

the works that I do shall he do also; he shall raise the dead, heal all manner of diseases, and cast out devils; things which Christ gave his apostles power to do, when he first gave them a commission to preach the Gospel, and when he renewed and enlarged it: and which they did perform, not in their own name, and by their own power, but in the name, and by the power of Christ:

and greater works than these shall he do; meaning, not greater in nature and kind, but more in number; for the apostles, in a long series of time, and course of years, went about preaching the Gospel, not in Judea only, but in all the world; "God also bearing them witness with signs and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost", Hebrews 2:4, wherever they went: though perhaps by these greater works may be meant the many instances of conversion, which the apostles were instrumental in, and which were more in number than those which were under our Lord's personal ministry… Gill goes on to say this:

because I go to my Father; and upon my ascension the Spirit will be given, to you, which shall not only enable you to perform miracles, as proofs of your apostleship, and the doctrine you preach, but which shall powerfully attend the Gospel to the conversion of multitudes of souls.”

So, the asking God *in the name of Jesus* we see in the passage was a specific promise to a specific group about specific things they were sent out to do.

In light of that, we should ask, is there any way in which it applies to us? Is the common phrase “*In Jesus’ name, AMEN*” needed? Is it Okay? How should a Christian end a prayer?

Well, what we know from the rest of scripture’s teaching is that Christ is our Mediator. Because of Jesus, all believers have the ability and humble honor to go to God through the finished work of Christ Jesus and humbly ask for things based on now being God’s child. “*In Jesus’ name, AMEN*” can be a fine and fitting way to acknowledge that reality if that’s what you intend by the phrase. You may have heard some of us also end prayers with “it is because of Christ we pray.” The intent of that wording we use is to acknowledge and remember the truth of Jesus being our Mediator and His victorious sufficiency for our reconciliation to God. For some of us, it helps that we’re **not** using a common and easily overlooked phrase, but rather a phrase that uniquely reminds us these things.

So, Is the common phrase “In Jesus’ name, AMEN” needed?…is it the exclusive way to end a Christian prayer? No.

Is it Okay? Yes, it’s not wrong or bad *if the intention is sound*. Know that your prayers are not more powerful for including that specific phrase….know that God is not in your debt, owing you whatever you want, even if you ask him with a certain formula or phrase….know that it is good and honoring to acknowledge Christ’s work and role in your prayer. Be thoughtful and intentional with the words of your prayers.

**Closing:**

There are many other verses that must be considered rightly or you may be falsely frustrated or even cause to doubt your faith when it comes to prayer. I’m hopeful that this closing will clear that up for you since we don’t have time to dive into every verse tonight.

**Psalm 37:4Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.**

When God is our ultimate delight, when He is the true treasure of our hearts, then we want what He wants more than any other desire we may have. This Psalm declares that if this is the case then we will always get what we want because what we want most is the LORD’s will.

**John 15:7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.**

Gill again says this about this passage.

Abiding in Christ is here explained by his words or doctrines abiding in his disciples; by which are meant his Gospel, and the truths of it. This abides when it comes in power, and becomes the engrafted word; and may be said to do so, when such, in whose hearts it has a place, and has taken deep root, continue to have a relish and savour of it, a true and hearty affection for it, esteeming it above their necessary food; when they hold fast the profession of it, stand fast in it, steadfastly abide by it, and constantly attend on it; all which is a considerable evidence that they do, yea, there is a promise that they "shall continue in the Son and in the Father", 1 John 2:24; The blessing and privilege that such shall enjoy is,

ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you; or, as some copies read it, "it shall be given you": but this must be understood not of temporal things, as riches, honours, profits, pleasures, or whatever even the carnal mind of a believer himself may sometimes desire; but of things spiritual, and with such limitations and restrictions as these; whatever is according to the will of God, for the Spirit of God himself asks for no other for the saints; whatever is for the glory of God, and for their own spiritual profit and edification; and whatever is agreeably to the words and doctrines of Christ, which abide in them. Every thing of this kind they ask in faith, and with a submission to the divine will, they may expect to receive.

And so it is with all believers. If you ask of the Lord through the mediation of Jesus and truly submit to His will in all things you will always receive what the Father wills. And as I have said before in other lessons, if you had the full knowledge of God you would never want anything other than what He has given you. He is perfect and He is good and therefore we can trust Him and His plan for our lives!