

Pray in Christ's name...you will be heard by God
Matthew 6:5-8, John 15:9-17

Show video clip. (Can you hear me now)

Friends - last week we acknowledged that most people have prayed at least once in their life. In fact it's probably the most common "religious" thing that people will do.

When we're in trouble, or we need help or we don't know what to do, when nothing else seems to work... we pray.

We send up a "Hail Mary" prayer of desperation to God – to whatever or whomever he/she/it may be.

However, the fact is that such kinds of prayers do very little to relieve our anxiety and worry... because prayer is being used as a last resort.

And when you throw a "Hail Mary" pass in football friends - there's no guarantee it will be caught, and in the same way a "Hail Mary" prayer has no guarantee of being heard and thus of being answered...

And if we are going to grow to use prayer more intentionally, if we are going to become prayer warriors who can use prayer to revolutionize the lives of people and community around us – well...

we need assurance, confidence really – just like the fellow in the video clip - that God can hear our prayers, wherever we are and is able deal with whatever we bring to him.

The sad truth is that many people believe God is too important, too busy, too far away and not concerned with what might be happening in our lives – like some big shot celebrity or CEO or politician.

Have you ever tried to get in contact with someone like that, someone in the upper echelons of power, someone who has resources and influence?

Have you ever tried to get their attention for your cause so they could help you with it?

Maybe you have a great idea on how to boost employee morale at your corporation – so you just pick up the phone and call the CEO to tell him about it - right?

Or maybe you need some help interpreting a particular section of the income tax law – so you simply email the Minister of Finance – Jim Flaherty to get his advice...

Well you know this can be difficult, if not impossible to do.

Back in the early '90's, when the internet and email was relatively new... one of my fellow students at University decided to send an email to the President of the United States – Bill Clinton- to protest some U.S. foreign policy.

However - All he got back was a form letter, thanking him for contacting the Office of the President, blah – blah – blah...

He was left wondering if President Clinton had received and heard what he wanted to say – in fact he wondered if anyone actually read the emails that went to the Whitehouse.

So he sent another email. This time he wrote - “Dear Mr. President, I would like to kill you.”

Well, he discovered that someone actually does read these letters - because a few days later the RCMP showed up at the school to investigate who had sent this email threat.

Not exactly the kind of interaction with the President's Office that he was looking for.

The point is friends that if you don't know whether or not your concerns and needs and input are being received and heard... you might end up doing some pretty foolish things to get the attention you're looking for.

People end up doing the same thing with prayer as well, here are some examples...

1) Shedding blood – humans have offered blood sacrifices since before history in order to attract divine attention.

In 1 Kings 18, the bible tells the story of how the priests of Baal would cut themselves when they were trying to get their god – Baal, to respond to their prayers.

2) Others use Posture, Position, Repetition and Hygiene.

Muslims believe that in order to speak with God one must face east, and follow prescribed postures, hand gestures, and that your body and clothes and the place of prayer must be clean, and they must pray only in Arabic.

And Hindus believe that “Ohm” is a divine sound, so if you repeat it enough and meditate on it for long enough - you may be able to connect with the divine in your prayers

Other branches of Hinduism use repetitive phrases like “*Hare KRSNA, KRSNA KRSNA, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare*” and they repeat this over and over and over when they pray.

3) And there’s a third option as well – for those who are a bit squeamish about blood and who can’t speak Arabic, and are

short on the time needed for repetitive chanting... there’s always offering God a bargain.

Usually goes something like “Dear God if you get me out of this situation I promise that I will... “_____,” be a kinder person, go to church, read the bible, give to charity, etc... just fill in the blank.

Well friends, the truth is that none of these things guarantee that God will hear and answer our prayers. Praying longer, more intensely, or more eloquently does not get God’s attention.

This is why Jesus instructs his disciples – and also us - in Matt 6:7 not to “*babble like the pagans*” when we pray – that doesn’t get God’s attention.

Instead, Jesus tells us in John 15:16 that “the Father will give us whatever we ask for - **in his name.**”

So there are no requirements to shed blood, use certain postures, or positions, languages, or sounds in order to ensure that God will listen and respond with favor to our prayers.

Rather we are simply to ask in the name of Jesus.

But asking in the name of Jesus is not a magic phrase that you tack onto the end of your wish list which somehow guarantees your wishes will be granted.

Rather, the larger context in John 15 teaches us that praying in Jesus name is about three things - Agape Love, Relationships, and Kingdom business.

One of the first things you will notice when you read this passage is how many times love is mentioned in it, nine - to be specific.

And it's a particular kind of love too – it is Agape.

Agape is considered the highest form of love because it is doing what is best for someone else, even when that person will hate you, hurt you or could possibly even kill you for your efforts.

It is to draw close to someone who is toxic and poisonous and to absorb that into yourself in order to heal them.

Agape describes God's love for human beings.

Because of Sin we naturally hate God and want to rebel against Him, ignore him, but God "agape's" us.

He draws close to us in covenants – through Noah, Abraham, Moses, King David – until finally He Fathered Jesus Christ – His Word became flesh, uniting with human nature in its rebellious sinful toxic state.

Jesus Christ proclaimed that He was salvation to other humans who didn't believe him, who hated him, and who eventually killed him.

And He did so because He knew his death was the only way to pay for prior covenant unfaithfulness and also to begin a new covenant relationship with them.

So in this passage Christ says – “As the Father *agaped* me, so I have *agaped* you....my command is this- *agape* each other as I have *agaped* you”

Friends, to pray in Jesus name is to speak to God with an understanding of how humans have been rescued by God through Christ when God had every right to destroy us because of our rebellion...but he didn't.

So, when we pray – we need to acknowledge our sins, confess them if need be, and ask for forgiveness...

It also means that we are praying that others will come to an awareness of their own sin and will be given forgiveness through Jesus.

And it especially means that we are asking God to help us love others the way He loved us.

Remember Jesus taught us that we should “*love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us*” (Matt 5:44)

Additionally this means our prayers will be characterized by humility, thanksgiving, gratitude, and joy... because we have been forgiven.

In fact Jesus says he's told us this “so our joy may be complete.” (Matt 15:11) and remember last week we learned that joy was the context for praying more intentionally...

And while joy is the context for praying more intentionally, today.... we discover that Relationship is the context for having the assurance that God hears our prayers.

This passage is full of relationship terms: father, friend, servant, master...

So what this teaches us about prayer is that it's not **what** you know or do - it's **who** you know.

Now if my friend who tried to email President Clinton had known someone who worked for the President – he might have had an easier time trying to get in touch with Him.

Back in 2005, I had the opportunity to meet and speak with the Prime Minister of Canada, who at the time was Jean Chrétien, some questions about leadership, the War in Iraq and whether or not he planned to run for another shot at being Prime Minister.

I had this opportunity because I am close friends with someone who worked for the Prime Minister's Office and had received an invitation to a dinner that was being held in honor of my friend.

It wasn't because I was someone of importance, stature, and standing but simply because I was a close friend to someone who was close to the Prime Minister.

Friends it works the same way with prayer.

In this passage we hear Jesus telling his disciples that their relationship with him has grown to a point where they are no longer “students” or servants – instead they are his “friends”

And when Jesus calls them his friends it means that He is entrusting his mission to them, he is taking them into his confidence so they can carry on in his place... *“you are my friends if you do what I command”* (vs 14)

So it would be comparable to the disciples being made full partners in the firm, they are no longer contract employees.

Thus everything Jesus has learned from his Father he has made known to his disciples, who in turn have passed it on to us through the gospels.

So Luke records Jesus announcing in 4:18-19 of his gospel that Jesus announced he was sent *“to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind,*

to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

So praying in Jesus name is to ask for the things that Jesus was sent into this world to do – to ask for signs of the Kingdom of Heaven to be given – healing from sickness and disease, deliverance from evil spirits, miracles over nature, for people to know God has sent salvation!

Praying in Jesus name is praying that people's eyes would be opened to see that salvation - the truth about who Jesus Christ is! As He says in John 10:30 *"I and the Father are one"*

Friends – Jesus Christ is God – fully human yet fully divine, so if there is one thing you remember from this message as to why God hears prayers offered in Jesus name... it's because Jesus IS the mediator between human and divine. He is fully human and fully God –

So, the final aspect of what it means to pray in Jesus name then has to do with the Kingdom of God.

You will remember that when Christ taught us to pray He instructed us to ask "your Kingdom come your will be done – on earth as it is in Heaven"

So in our passage this morning when Jesus says "I've chosen you to go and bear fruit that will last." (vs. 16) he is speaking about how we manifest the Kingdom of God – instances where we help to make it "on earth... as it is in Heaven."

And that starts in our prayers friends... praying in Jesus name...

So as we pray about anything and everything - our prayers will become more effective as we frame what we are praying about in terms of Christ's mission, in terms of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Just this past week, on Monday actually, I received some unsettling news which made me rather anxious and worried.

And seeing that I was worried and anxious a number of people reminded me of the verse in Philippians that I had just preached about on the Sunday before...

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

So – being held accountable to practice what I preach I sat down to bring my situation before God in prayer.

But I was really feeling anxious and worried and somewhat consumed by it and so my first attempt at praying about was just sort of like “agh God I’m really worried about this – please help me feel better... in Jesus name amen.

Which, truth be told didn’t really help me feel any better.

So I figured that I need to be a bit more intentional about what I was going to say to God, but what to say...

And suddenly the Holy Spirit gave me the insight to pray about my situation in light of the Kingdom of God – and then, all of a sudden it all made sense as to what I should pray about.

I could articulate the specific needs for the situation and understand what I was feeling. So I began to pray framing my requests and asking God for particular needs with regards to protect his Kingdom work and seeing it continue in the particular instance that was concerned about.

And just as the scriptures promised - I had peace, the anxiety and the worry vanished.

And I knew that I hadn’t just talked myself out of feeling worried, like we can do sometimes...

No... I was given peace because what I am asking for – Is in Jesus name! Amen?!

Friends, it is absolutely true that we can pray to God about anything and everything – but, to pray about anything and

everything in Jesus name means that we need see our concerns in the light of God's Kingdom.

So friends, when you are anxious and worried, when you have problems and needs, when life is overwhelming and your initial prayers don't seem to bring any comfort...

I want to encourage you friends – at those times, ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray about your situation in light of God's Kingdom

And I'll give you a few scripture verses, which the Holy Spirit might use to help you do that ...

"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Gen 1:28)

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."
(Gen 50:20)

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me - to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19)

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Rom 8:28)

Pray about your situation in light of what God is doing in you and around you so make it on earth as it is in heaven – and friends you will then be praying in Jesus name.

You know, there are few things more frustrating than trying to get ahold of someone, trying to communicate with someone, trying to send information and not knowing if your messages are being received – especially in an urgent situation.

Friends – give glory to our Lord Jesus Christ, that because of who He is, and because of what He has done – we have assurance and confidence that our Heavenly Father hears our prayers and will respond –

In Jesus name... Amen.

Amen.