

"But I Prayed in Jesus' Name!"

John 15:15-16

Who of us have heard someone (or heard ourselves) share our frustration when God didn't answer their prayers say something like 'But I prayed in Jesus' Name' or 'I claimed the promises of God'? If we have never voiced it, we probably have thought it. We've looked at verses like this or its partner in 15:7

15:7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

14:13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Of course, as we've been reminding ourselves over this series is that don't take verses out of their context. Whole theologies and churches have been formed on taking Bible verses out of their contexts. Every verse in Scripture is written in sentences in paragraphs or poems within the context of a letter or book. When we study the context, we get a better understanding. And John 15:15-16 is another classic example of misapplying a verse because of a misinterpretation based on failure to observe it in its context.

John 15 is part of Jesus' larger discourse given to the 11 apostles (Judas has left) after Jesus' Last Passover. He has a lot to say from 13:31-16:33. A lot of this is connected and there is some repetition because He has important things to share with His disciples that He wants to make sure they hear.

There is a change of scenery at the end of 14:31 when Jesus says to the 11, 'Come, let us leave' and Ch. 15 begins. Some suggest Jesus has moved to a vineyard – possibly in the Garden of Gethsemane – but we really don't know. He uses the last 'I am statement in John with 'I am the Vine and my Father is the gardener who cuts off fruitless branches and prunes the branches that do bear fruit. That Jesus' followers bear fruit is the overall context of Ch. 15, and vv.9-17 may be an explanation of the image of the vineyard with the continual appeal to remain or abide in Jesus. As well, Jesus continually exhorts His disciples to love each other and others as He has loved them. Therefore, these three themes – fruit bearing, abiding, loving – frame the overall passage.

Vv. 12-17 form a sub unit, framed by the repeated command to love one another in vv.12 and 17. When we look at v.16 which really ends the paragraph – v.17 being a repeat of v.12 for emphasis – we actually see that praying in Jesus' name is a result of a flow of statements in vv. 12-16a. V. 16 says,

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.

So He told them in 14:13 – same sermon/discourse –

13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

So, 15:16 explains why we should pray in Jesus' Name because ...

Praying in Jesus' Name Bears Fruit for God **(15:16b)**

We're going to work our way backwards in this text so we properly understand it. Praying in Jesus' name is a goal that we must seek to achieve. We pray this way because that's how we bear fruit. Effectual prayer is fruit producing. Not just the answers to our prayers but the act of praying properly is the evidence that spiritual fruit is abiding in us. If effective praying reveals spiritual fruit then praying in Jesus name means

Our requests can't be for self but for God

To pray 'in Jesus' Name' is not a magic phrase that guarantees our prayers will be heard or answered. That puts the emphasis on us. To say 'in Jesus' name' at the end of our prayers as a way to manipulate God to get what we want makes prayer about us and not God. That approach takes God off the throne and in effect, we make God our puppet to serve our desires if we say the right words.

We pray 'In Jesus' Name' because Jesus is the Son of God who alone has access to God. When we place our faith in Him we are given access to God's throne of mercy because the Son has full access to God's throne. We go through Jesus. To pray in His Name must also mean in accordance with what Jesus would allow and in accordance with Jesus' standards. John writes in his first epistle in 5:13-15,

¹³I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. ¹⁴And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

The asking has to be according to His will, not ours. In His Name means we submit to His will. James 4:3 tells us why we sometimes don't get answers to our prayers:

³When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

⁴You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

When our motives for prayer are self-driven and not for God's purposes we won't hear much from God about them. On the opposite end of that, just because our prayers aren't being answered isn't necessarily proof that we are out of God's will. He has a time for everything and different purposes that we can't see,

Another verse often misused to make it say we get what we want is Ps. 37:4, which says,

⁴Delight yourselves in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Of course all people hear is the last part. They ignore the context. Here's the verses that precede and follow v.4;

¹ Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong; ² for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. ³ Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. ⁴ Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵ Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: ⁶ He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun. ⁷ Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.

When your unsaved neighbours and friends seem to be having a better life than you, don't be envious nor worry about your own needs. Trust in God. Delight yourself in God and you will find that He is all we really need. We know how God works and how life will end for us one day – in perfect glory – and how it will end for those who reject Him and Jesus. When we delight ourselves in God, the desires of our heart are tuned to God's desires and we find we pray more according to His will, praying for the things He wants to see happen.

This is the direction Jesus is pointing His disciples in (and us) as we wrestle with prayer and seek to bear fruit in prayer. How does that happen? Let's back up to v.14,

¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 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.

Again we pray in Jesus' Name because that's how we bear fruit. Effectual prayer is fruit producing. Not only the answers to our prayers but the act of praying properly is the evidence that spiritual fruit is abiding in us. The more we understand how to pray under Jesus' authority and power the more spiritual fruit we bear in prayer. Which comes from the confidence we have in who Jesus is and how much He loves us.

Praying in Jesus' Name is Anchored in the Assurance of our Salvation (15:14-16a)

Jesus says ...

We are chosen (v.16a)

Normally, if you wanted to be a disciple of a rabbi you had to apply. Then the Rabbi would assess you and test you and if you passed his tests, you were allowed to follow him. Jesus, however, took the ones who most likely never got that far. They ended up fishing like their fathers but Jesus chose them, not based on any tests or quizzes but by His grace.

Eph. 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

We choose Jesus by faith as God by grace gives us the faith to believe! We don't qualify. We have nothing to brag about in order to prove we are worthy to be Jesus' disciples. That should make us thankful and humble, and our prayer life should reflect that. And we're more than just disciples.

We are informed friends (v.15)

Jesus says to his followers 'You're not slaves; you're friends. Slaves are told what to do by their masters but they are not often told why, not is it their job to know why. Jesus however says you are My friends and as such He makes known to us everything that the Father wants us to know. How does He make God's will known – which is how we are to pray. By His Word. The more we know His Word the more assured we are of His love for us and our relationship with Him. So,

We are to be obedient to the information of His Word (v.14)

This is how Jesus informs us; He points to his Father's words. We are to obey His Word which proves we are His disciples. This has been the theme of this passage so far. Going back to 15:1,

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

Many times we want to press this metaphor of Jesus' and make it sound like this is how we keep or lose our salvation. He's already made it clear who is 'clean' and who is not. Judas was not clean. He lived with Jesus and the disciples for three years. He was even involved in ministry. However, in the end no real fruit was shown and he left. Fruit is slowly produced over time as the branch, which is attached to the vine, 'abides/remains/draws nutrients from the life-giving vine. In time, fruit will show because we are remaining in His words. Listen to these other verses about our need to stay in the Word:

14:24 He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

If we know Him there will be signs that we do by obeying His Word. In His prayer later that night Jesus will say to God,

17:8 For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

We need the Word of God because through the Word we know who Jesus is and what He expects from us. The more informed we are of Jesus, the more likely we are to pray 'in His Name', according to his will, by His authority and in His power.

17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

God's Word sanctifies us; makes us holy; sets us apart as His. This is what distinguishes us as His disciples. This is how we produce the fruit of spiritual maturity by abiding in His Word, allowing our minds to be saturated with it so we think it and live it; like Jesus Himself. And one other way we show we are obeying the Word is by our victory over sin. Two verses in 1 John:

1:10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

2:14 I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

If we are in the Word and allowing it to work in our hearts we are confessing sin, not denying it. If we are allowing the Word we are having victory over the temptations the enemy throws at us. Again praying in Jesus' Name reveals we're allowing His words to shape our mind and the words we pray. That's how we bear spiritual fruit. We're allowing His words to shape our minds and prayers because we're confident in our salvation and we

Pray in Jesus' Name as our Response to His Love **(15:12-13)**

Remember how this section begins and ends?

12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends. ... 17 This is my command: Love each other.

Jesus may have called them His friends but these friends were still sinners, who would abandon him. Jesus says love others; yes, even though they are not perfect and will fail you and will hurt you – because this is how I loved you. I died for you even while you were sinners. So how does this show in our spiritual fruit producing prayer life? We pray according to His will and His words. We pray as Jesus prayed in the Garden, *'Not my will be done Lord, but yours'* for the difficult experiences in our life That includes praying in the suffering we experience that god will accomplish His will in us. That, that comes out of our mouth when we're praying for healing and recovery and for difficulties to go away, and that we also pray help me to submit to Your will in this Lord.

We pray as Jesus commanded us to pray in Matt. 5:44-45 that we would bless and pray for our enemies. Those who oppose the gospel and who make our lives hard. Instead of being bitter and trying to get even, we surrender our will to God and pray for the repentance of our enemies and, should they not repent, leave the justice to God, who will have His way.

And in a similar vein, we pray that we would forgive those who sin against us so that our sins are forgiven. What sins? The sins of bitterness and unforgiveness that we harbor against those who sin against us.

Therefore, to pray in Jesus' Name is to pray according to His will, submitting to His ability and authority to do His work when and how he wants for the purpose of God's glorification not ours. If that's not how we are praying then how do we get there? By allowing His Word to abide/dwell in us. The more His word is in our minds and hearts, we'll be reminded over and over again of His love for us, of the assurance of our salvation and His purpose for us to bear spiritual fruit. The evidence that we are producing spiritual fruit is reflected in the Christlikeness of our prayers;

- Praying for God's will to be done, not ours
- Praying for God to be exalted, not us
- Praying for people to know God, and grow in God including ourselves
- Praying for what God delights in not what we desire for self

The more our mind is saturated with God's Word, the more our prayers will sound like His Word so they will be heard.

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