

Building On Our Knees, Part 3: “Promises and Abiding”

John 15:1 ESV “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. **2** Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. **3** Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. **4** Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. **5** I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. **6** If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. **7** If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. **8** By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. **9** As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. **10** If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. **11** These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

- I. John 13-17 records for us what some have called the “Upper Room Discourse” or the “Farewell Discourse”.
 - A. Some call it the “Upper Room Discourse”, because it records the words that Jesus spoke to his disciples as they celebrated the Jewish Passover in Jerusalem in an upper chamber that they had secured for that purpose.
 - B. Others call it the “Farewell Discourse”, because this discussion took place at the final meal that Jesus would share with his disciples (thus: “The Last Supper”) before being arrested and crucified the following day.
 - C. At this meal Jesus discussed many important things with his disciples.
 1. He taught them how authority would look in the kingdom; that the leaders would be the servants of all. He then demonstrated this reality by washing his disciples’ feet; which was one of the most humiliating acts performed by the lowest household servant (or slave) in their day.
 2. He revealed the fact that one of them would betray him, and that Peter would deny him.
 3. He told them that he was returning to the Father, and therefore going away from them, but that this was to be to their advantage because after his departure, he would send the Holy Spirit to be in them.
 4. Jesus told them that the world would hate them as it had hated him.
 5. He even told them that in the coming days, they would have increased and almost unbearable sorrow, but that ultimately peace would be granted to them because he had overcome the world.
 6. Jesus ends this time by praying for strength, protection and unity for his disciples in a great, high-priestly prayer found in John 17.
 - D. And speaking of prayer, since we are in a series called “Building on our knees”, I want to focus on five statements that Jesus made in regards to prayer within his farewell discourse, and what those statements mean in the light of the finished work of Christ. Let’s read each of them together:

1. **John 14:13 ESV** Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. **14** If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.
 - a) Here, Jesus states something that is an incredible promise: “Whatever you ask...this will I do” and then he repeats it!
 - b) And what does he say is the reason for this promise of unlimited answers to our feeble prayers? “that the Father may be glorified in the Son”!
 - c) God is glorified when your prayers are answered, because his power and his goodness are on display! If you really believed that God had a vested interest the success of our praying, how would it affect the way you prayed?
 - d) Sometimes we act like we must trick or persuade a reluctant God in order to see our prayers answered. But what if you discovered that God wanted to answer your prayers that He might be glorified? How could we not want to pray under those circumstances?
2. **John 15:16 ESV** 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.
 - a) Jesus increases the intensity of the promise here, saying that you were handpicked by him!
 - (1) You did not just fortunately bump into him in the darkness of your sin.
 - (2) You sure didn’t find him, because you weren’t looking! He found YOU!
 - b) Jesus also says that you were picked and **appointed** for a reason - that you would bear fruit. Paul tells us what that fruit is in Galatians 5...
 - (1) Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22).
 - (2) These are not things that **some** are destined to acquire or develop, but Jesus has appointed **you** bear this kind of fruit. He’s **appointed** you! He called you to be his, so that you will bear fruit...
 - c) ...and not just **bear** fruit, but that your fruit should abide (or remain)! This means the fruit that God has appointed you to bear will not rot or be wasted. What you produce will certainly bring glory to the Father!
 - d) And here again, as you bear fruit it is for a purpose: “**so that** whatever you ask the Father...he may give it to you.” The promise of answered prayer is repeated for the fruit bearers!
3. **John 16:23 ESV** In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. **24** Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.
 - a) This passage begins in an odd way: “In that day you will ask nothing of me”. Isn’t that what prayer is? Asking Jesus for mercy and provision? Yes and no.
 - (1) Up to this point, the disciples were viewing God just as the children of Israel did when God descended on Mount Sinai to give them the Law.
 - (2) **Exodus 20:18 ESV** Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off

19 and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; **but do not let God speak to us**, lest we die.”

- (3) The Israelites wanted Moses to serve a mediator role so that they would not have to face God themselves. The disciples likewise could not fathom God as approachable, so they went to Jesus.
- b) Though Jesus **would** play the role of mediator like Moses, Moses role as mediator was incomplete. Jesus work would be finished.
 - (1) While Moses mediation made him primarily a “go-between” with God and the people, Jesus mediation would find its completion in **reconciliation**; making a way for the disciples to come boldly into the very presence of God, as we discussed last week.
 - (2) Therefore, they would no longer ask Jesus to go to the Father for them, they would henceforth bring their requests to the Father themselves, in the name of the Son. Prayer “in Jesus name” celebrates the fact that we can come boldly to the Father ourselves because of what the Son has done! Christ is the key to the throne room!
 - c) Again, we see a promise repeated: “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” Their confident asking and receiving in prayer would result in fullness (not just an increase) of joy!
- 4. **John 16:26 ESV** In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; **27 for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.**
 - a) A few verses later we see a reiteration of the same thought.
 - b) This time, however, Christ points that this direct access to the Father is because of something the children of Israel trembling at the base of Sinai could never have fathomed; that the Father loved them! But the disciples could confidently enjoy the love of the Father, because they have loved and believed in the Son.
 - c) A new day had truly dawned for those the Son had called! But there’s one more verse I want to examine. We read it earlier as part of our text...
- II. **John 15:7 ESV** If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.
 - A. This is the sixth instance where Jesus makes a vast, sweeping promise about prayer. I fear that we can easily miss or dismiss what was said. Can we review what he said in these verses one more time?
 - 1. **Whatever** you ask in my name, this **I will do**...(John 14:13)
 - 2. If you ask me **anything** in my name, **I will do it**. (John 14:14)
 - 3. ... so that **whatever** you ask the Father in my name, **he may give it to you**. (John 15:16)
 - 4. ... **whatever** you ask of the Father in my name, **he will give it to you**. (John 16:23)
 - 5. Ask, and you **will receive**...(John 16:24)
 - 6. ... ask **whatever** you wish, and **it will be done** for you. (John 15:7)
 - B. We just read what is essentially the same promise repeated 6 times in the span of just three chapters! We’ll call it the “whatever promise”. Don’t you think that’s

significant? Surely Jesus wants us to hear something here, and be transformed by it.

1. But oftentimes we don't live like we believe these verses, because if we did, man, would we ever pray! I think there are three main objections that arise when we come to verses like these.
 - a) First there is a fear of being swept in to a "name it and claim it", prosperity mindset.
 - (1) All of us have seen excesses and abuses coming from late-night TV polyester pulpитеers that have embarrassed and annoyed us.
 - (2) But the problem with disregarding what you just read on that basis is that these relatively unqualified promises came from the lips of the one and only Son of God!
 - b) Secondly, we dismiss these words on the basis of pretense of so-called "theology".
 - (1) Some believe that God no longer promises such abundant power and provision for his children.
 - (2) Others would cling to some religious or denominational tradition that has no room for such confidence in God's limitless ability.
 - (3) But what could we possibly hope to lose by believing that God can do anything, and actually wants to meet the needs of his children?
 2. But for most of us, I believe that the doubts that arise when we read promises like that are simply because they do not correlate with our experience. We have often prayed, only to come away empty handed. This has left us jaded and bitter if we're honest. "Whatever I ask, indeed!", we say.
 - C. But do you have the courage this morning to ask "why"? Do you have the guts to ask why promises like the 6 we just read seem so unreal? Do we have what it takes to say, "Why aren't my prayers being answered?"
 - D. The most straight-forward mention of the problem of unanswered prayer is found in the book of James.
- III. **James 4:1 ESV** What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? **2** You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. **You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4** You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. **5** Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? **6** But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." **7** Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. **8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.** Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. **9** Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. **10** Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.
- A. "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." Some versions will exchange passions for "pleasures" or even uglier,

“lusts”. James sticks a finger in our faces and says that often we do not have what we ask for in prayer because of the misguided desires with which we ask.

B. Let me say that this is not the only reason that our prayers go unanswered. But can I recommend that we start here? If we don’t examine our hearts for sin in our times of prayer, we can do far more damage to our souls than good.

1. James says that “lustful, passionate, pleasure-seeking” prayer is nothing less than spiritual adultery! Adultery that makes us the lover of the world and therefore the enemy of God! James says the fruit borne by the this kind of “gimme” praying is never anything better than rotten, stinking pride!
2. “Gimme praying” prays for better jobs and paychecks with no thought whatsoever to God’s requirement of personal contentment, or the needs of others. It prays for our own advancement and the fulfillment of personal ambition with no thought to servanthood, dying to ourselves, or the glory of God.
3. The reason our gimme prayers remain unanswered is because, as James says, “God resists the proud”! He will not be mocked by lavishing upon you that which will make you the recipient of the glory only he deserves.
4. The truth of the matter is, because God loves us so much, he often withholds the silly things we plead for, so that he can reveal to us that he is the only thing worth having! Want your prayers answered? Listen to James’ counsel: **“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”**
 - a) So many people are not experiencing all the promises of God because they think they were saved and brought into the army of God in order to go on vacation! R&R! Peace, peace when there is no peace!
 - b) This is war time! We’ve forgotten that we are a people on mission! As we delight in drawing near to God, you can rest assured that he will provide everything you need to complete **his** mission! But you have no such promise that he will provide what you need to accomplish **your** mission.
 - c) How do we get on with the master’s business? “Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

C. All of this only affirms what Christ said in the promise we read earlier. **John 15:7 ESV** If you **abide in me**, and **my words abide in you**, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

1. To abide in him means that he is my dwelling place. My shelter. My fortress.
 - a) **Psalm 91:9 ESV** Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place—the Most High, who is my refuge—**10 no evil** shall be allowed to befall you, **no plague** come near your tent. **11** For he will command his angels concerning you to **guard you in all your ways**. **12** On their hands **they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone**. **13** You will **tread on the lion and the adder**; the young lion and the serpent **you will trample underfoot**. **14 (God Speaking!)** “Because he holds fast to me in love, **I will deliver him**; I will **protect him**, because he knows my name. **15** When he calls to me, **I will answer him**; I will **be with him** in trouble; I

will **rescue him** and **honor him**. **16** With **long life** I will **satisfy him** and **show him my salvation**.”

- b) Now I don't know about you, but the psalmist just described the relationship with God I'm looking for! And did you realize that what was described is only possible through Jesus!
 - (1) **“Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place”** in the Old Testament corresponds to **“If you abide in me”** in the New!
 - (2) To the one who abides, God promises, “When he calls to me, I will answer him!”
 - 2. But that is only half of what Jesus says! He also says “If...**my words** abide in you”.
 - a) How important is the Word of God to you? Do you have a decades-old Sunday-school knowledge of God's word? Do you have a couple-Sundays-a-month-whatever-Pastor-Marc-serves-up knowledge?
 - b) Or are you like Jesus who was able to say to the devil himself, **Matthew 4:4 ESV** “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”
 - 3. For the words of Christ to abide in us, we must live by them. We must cherish them. We must consume them. They must be so much more than the “good book” (there's lots of “good books”!). The Bible must be taken by faith to be “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12).
- IV. Nothing will inform and empower our praying like the word of God!
- A. When the word abides in you, you learn the character and nature of God and as a result, you love him more, you trust him more, you desire him more than any “thing” or “outcome” that he could grant you!
 - B. When the word abides in you, you never have to wonder if you're praying according to God's will, because his will becomes clearer and clearer in the process. And when you're praying according to God's will, you can pray with total confidence!
 - C. When the word abides in you, your love for God carries you through any delayed answers or times when God says “no”, because you find that feasting on him; that knowing him, is enough! You trust that he is making you into a vessel of honor in the hard work of committed, word-saturated praying!
- V. The message of the Farewell Discourse is that there is great power and promise given to the praying man or woman in the gospel, but that the fulfillment of the promise is not really a healing or financial blessing, but that Jesus himself is the fulfillment of every promise in prayer, and he is enough.
- A. This is not to say that God doesn't answer frequently and miraculously our cries for help, healing, deliverance, wisdom, because he does!
 - 1. The bible has command after command to approach him in prayer!
 - 2. And we are commanded to do so in faith, with no doubting! We are promised that mountains will move, the sick will be healed, and that demons will flee.

- B. But until we find all of our satisfaction by abiding in God, in Jesus, and in his words, we will never be able to find any satisfaction whatsoever in anything he gives. He is the prize.
- C. Let us repent and return to see the Lord. Want your prayers answered? Learn to abide in Jesus!