

Ask for Anything in My Name

In our Scripture passage today, most of us can't help but be drawn to the place where Jesus says:

"And I will do whatever you ask in my name..." (John 14:13)

When we hear that we think, "Wait, did He really say that?" I mean, who of us hears that and doesn't begin to think of all the things we need or want? "Wow! Jesus is giving me a divine credit card! This is better than the lottery!" But is that what He's really offering us?

David Brooks, in a column he wrote for *The New York Times* that he entitled, "The Moral Bucket List," says that speakers at college graduations are telling young adults to ask the wrong question. He writes:

Commencement speakers are always telling young people to follow their passions. "Be true to yourself." This is a vision of life that begins with self and ends with self. But people on the road to [maturity] do not find their vocations by asking, what do I want from life? They ask, what is life asking of me? How can I match my intrinsic talent with one of the world's deep needs? ¹

I think Jesus would say to Mr. Brooks, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

Today, we're going to examine the next seven verses in Jesus' last lecture to His disciples. It took place in the Upper Room where they had all just celebrated Jesus' re-invention of the Passover Meal that we now call "The Lord's Supper." Philip interrupts Jesus' lecture with a request, which Jesus then uses to teach us how to make requests of Him. And let me say at the outset, there's more here than meets the eye! First, we need to see...

I. Whom We Ask.

Philip's request is this:

... **"Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."** (John 14:8)

On the surface, Jesus gives Philip a straightforward response. He says:

... **"Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father..."** (John 14:9)

But as Jesus continues to teach, He is describing a foundational doctrine that He wants not only Philip but all of us to understand because it is critical to the very concept of our making any request. Jesus describes to Philip the unity of the Trinity. In these seven verses, He affirms His unity with the Father and later in this Gospel, He affirms His and the Father's unity with the Spirit. He describes their equality in their divine nature and, at the same time, the hierarchy in their divine roles.

First, He declares their unity, their equality as all being fully God. Verse 10:

"Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?"

Then, in the next sentence, He describes the hierarchy in the Trinity. Jesus always submits to the Father. Listen:

“The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me...” (John 14:10b, 11a)

Now, in the next paragraph, Jesus describes how the Spirit, too, is equally God (Divine Unity) but also submits to both the Father and the Son (Divine Hierarchy in roles):

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth... I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” (John 14:16, 18)

The Spirit is equally Divine. That is why though it's only the Spirit who is coming to be with the disciples, Jesus is able to say, *“I will come to you.”* But, the Spirit doesn't say whatever He feels like saying. No, He takes His instructions from both the Father and the Son. So, in chapter 16 Jesus says of Him...

“...He will not speak on His own; he will speak only what he hears...” (John 16:13b)

Why am I going into all this doctrinal mumbo-jumbo? Because you need to know of whom you are making your request. You are speaking, through Jesus, as prompted by the Holy Spirit, to Almighty God, the maker of heaven and earth. Do you properly understand that?

As Americans, we've become very nonchalant in our demeanor, in our attitude, in our approach to the Almighty. Have you noticed this? We love the verses in Hebrews that say, *“...since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God... Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace...”* (Heb. 4:14, 16 NLT) So, some think that we can saunter in, talking smack with “the big boss” on the throne. The ancient Jews, out of reverence, refused even to speak the name of God, which I think was an unfortunate extreme, something God never prohibited.

But, have we fallen out of the boat leaning too far the other way? We scoff at the very idea of reverence or bowing or paying homage to anyone. We mock people who do that. We focus on the words, *“So let us come boldly...”* and ignore the words *“...to the throne...”* Isn't Jesus our friend? Yes, but He is also the highest authority in the universe!

The question that Jesus asks of Philip, He's asking of American Christians today...

... “Don't you know me... even after I have been among you such a long time?...” (v.9)

Bible teacher, Warren Wiersbe, points out that in the New Testament, there are four levels of the Greek concept of 'knowing.' The first level is knowing a fact. The second is to understand the truth behind that fact. The third level is knowing a person in a relationship. It literally means to “believe in a person and become related to him or her.” This is obviously more than knowing “about” someone or knowing them by name. It includes the most intimate form of personal knowledge, the “knowing” of two people in a pure, biblical marriage.

But none of these levels is the kind of knowing that Jesus is asking of Philip. He's asking about the fourth level which is a knowing that goes beyond the physical, and even beyond the emotional, to the spiritual center of a person. It's knowing someone at such depth that it's hard to put into words. This is the knowledge that Paul describes in Philippians 3:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of KNOWING Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things... I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like

him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Phil. 3:7-8, 10-11)

Do we have this mindset when we come here to worship? Does the way we come to worship demonstrate this level of commitment and “knowing” or desire for “knowing” Jesus? I want to be sensitive to each of our schedules and the pressures we all live with, but I feel I need to ask this pointed question. If we really desired to know Jesus in this way, if we really wanted to show Him reverence and pay Him homage, would we show up for worship ten, fifteen, even twenty minutes late every week? Friends, this is the pattern at all our worship services. When we start worship, half of you aren’t here! I can’t help but believe that Jesus is offended by this and is asking us...

... “Don’t you know me...even after I’ve been among you such a long time? ...” (Jn. 14:9)

Please pray about this. When we make our requests of God, we need to do so in a way that shows Him proper respect, not as if this were a drive-thru. Secondly, we need to discover...

II. For What Should We Ask?

Beginning in verse 12, Jesus says: (John 14:12-13)

“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.”

On the surface level, Jesus is talking again about our asking for things, making requests of Him. But on a deeper level, He’s talking about His connection with every believer. Do you see it? The context for Him doing “...whatever we ask in His name,” is that, we would do “*what He has been doing.*” It goes back to this deepest level of knowing someone. Next week, as we study what Jesus has to say about the Holy Spirit, He’ll make this statement:

On that day (the day the Holy Spirit enters a person) you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. (John 14:20)

This is not some weird, hocus-pocus spirituality; this is the level of friendship and spiritual bonding that we were made for. It’s what your heart longs for and you’ve tried to find this or experience it in some relationship with another human being or through drugs or through your own imagination, but it isn’t possible in any of those ways! It’s only possible with God, in Jesus through the Holy Spirit. It’s only possible with the Triune God! This is why Jesus prays this remarkable prayer in John 17:

“...I pray... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (Jn. 17:20-21)

Can you believe this? Jesus is praying for us to experience a true “oneness” with Him and the Father and the Spirit. And, He says, when we are this unified with Him, other people will sense it. They’ll smell it! This is what the apostle Paul is talking about in II Cor. 2:14-15:

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

For one semester in college, I went to the University of Wisconsin at Madison. One of my professors smoked a pipe and if you went to talk with him in his office, you came out

smelling of smoke and your friends would say, “You’ve been with Professor Olsen, haven’t you?” After you’ve spent time with Jesus in prayer, have any of your friends ever said to you, “You’ve been with Jesus, haven’t you? My spirit smells it!”

This is what Jesus is talking about when He says, “*And I will do whatever you ask in my name...*” He’s saying, “When you start smelling like me, I’ll do whatever you ask, because your request and my will will be one thing.”

Does that help you answer “what you should ask for?” You see, if we are walking and living in that tight of a relationship with Jesus, then what kinds of things are we going to ask for? We’re going to ask for the kinds of things that, “*...the Son may bring glory to the Father.*” You’re not going to ask for selfish things! You’re not going to ask God to make you prettier than your best friend. You’re not going to ask for more power to heap revenge on your enemy.

Is it wrong to ask for healing? No, the Son could certainly bring glory to the Father in that. Is it wrong to ask for success in your job or your class or on the sports field? No, because the Son could bring glory to the Father through that IF you divert the glory someone tries to put on you over to Jesus. But, you see, that’s the question: are you asking so that the Father can receive glory or so that YOU can receive glory? If you are really tight with Jesus, if you have the aroma of Christ, then you’ll want the glory to go to Him. And that’s when He says...

You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. (John 14:14)

Finally, we need to discover...

III. How We Should Ask

We can have the right doctrine and carry the aroma of Christ from spending time with Him and still be confused on how we should approach Him. So, let’s let Scripture show us.

First, we ask humbly. We will do this if we remember that we’re coming to a throne. Jesus today, as we noted, is seated on a throne. Peter taught us this in his sermon at Pentecost:

God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. (Acts 2:32-33)

So, when we pray, we are coming before Jesus, our Savior and King on a throne in heaven. Humility is in order!

But secondly, we should also ask confidently. This is the literal translation of Hebrews 4:16:

Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

Is it possible to be both humble and confident at the same time? Absolutely! Being confident doesn’t mean arrogant, it means that you expect something to happen. It’s not talking about “self-confidence.” It’s talking about “Christ-confidence.” Because of the other promises of Jesus in the New Testament, like what He promised through the apostle Paul in Rom. 8:28 – that all things will work together for our good, we make our requests confidently knowing that we will receive mercy and grace that will work together for our ultimate good. Our confidence is in Christ.

And thirdly, we should ask faithfully or full of faith. Verse 12 highlights this when it says: **I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.** (John 14:12)

What is this talking about? How could any of us do 'greater things' than Jesus? Dr. J. Vernon McGee, who had a radio ministry for the last 18 years of his life, gives this wonderful explanation:

Jesus says, "...because I am going to the Father." You see, it is Christ who is still working, but today He is working through human instrumentality. He works through frail human clay, human flesh. I am amazed that I can give a Bible message over the radio and there are people who turn to Christ. Friend, that is greater. If Jesus Christ were here speaking to people, it would be a great work. When Jesus Christ takes you and me and works through us to reach people, that is greater. ²

So, we've covered a lot of biblical ground today, haven't we? We've talked about WHOM we should pray to (the Triune God), WHAT we should ask for (we should ask in His name so that the Son may bring glory to the Father) and HOW we should ask it (humbly, confidently and faithfully).

But we never asked why, did we? So, let me close with this. Philip asked Jesus to show him the Father. That's what started all this. Have you considered what this question tells us about Philip? He told Jesus that if he could just see the Father, that would be enough.

What would be enough for you? What's your highest desire in life? Whatever it is, when times get tough, as they were about to get for all the disciples, our highest priority is going to reveal itself. If you become distraught when the stock market crashes, we're gonna see what your highest priority is. If you are inconsolable if your team loses this weekend, we're gonna see what your highest priority is. If you throw a fit because you aren't invited to the "it" party of the season, we see what your highest priority is. Jesus was livid when He saw God's House being abused and misused. Whatever pushes us over the edge is a pretty big clue to what our highest priority is. So, if you were down to just one request of God, what would it be?

Just before Jesus' worst day began, He made this request of His Father:

... **"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you."** (Jn. 17:1)

Through our prayer or lack of it, by what we ask for and what we don't, by how we approach the throne of grace - we demonstrate our highest priority. May your desire begin to move with Philip's to the deep end of the pool, so that soon you will be praying with him...

Lord, show me the Father and that will be enough.

Let's pray...

¹ David Brooks, "The Moral Bucket List," *The New York Times* (4-11-15)

² J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee, Vol. IV* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), p. 461-462