

John on Jesus - Everything is About to Change

July 28, 2013

Good morning Faith Church. It is good to have you worshipping with us. As a church, we are studying the Gospel of John. Today, we finish John 16. It is a big piece of text. It is a hard piece of text. It is also the next piece of text as we work our way through this Gospel. At Faith Church, we believe we need to study all of God's Word. That is why we study the hard stuff, not just the easy stuff. When it comes to the Bible, we don't just cherry pick our favorite Bible verses and ignore the rest.

This section of the Gospel of John is known as The Upper Room Discourse. In John 13-16, we are only hours before Jesus goes to the cross. Judas already left to betray Jesus. He will be back in an hour or two. Jesus is giving his final words of instructions to his disciples, teaching them what they need to know to continue the mission of reconciling people to God through Christ's life. It is four chapters of instructions the disciples needed to carry on the mission and we need to carry on the mission. In Chapter 17, Jesus prayed for his disciples. Chapter 18 begins the narrative where he dies for his disciples. Even though we are in John 16, we are in the home stretch of this Gospel. It won't be long until we are done with the book.

This text breaks into three pieces: (1) The disciples told Jesus he spoke with too many metaphors. They were clueless about what Jesus was talking about when it came to the future. Only Jesus understood. (2) Jesus, once again, explained the future and how everything was about to change, for example, the

way they prayed. (3) The disciples thought they understood, but Jesus told them they were still clueless.

The disciples were clueless. Only Jesus understood.

The disciples didn't have any idea what was about to happen. You would think that after three years with Jesus and Jesus telling them multiple times throughout this Gospel that he was going to die in Jerusalem, you would think things would have began to click with the disciples. Unfortunately, they just didn't get it.

They thought Judas was out giving a gift to the poor and buying another bag of Doritos for the party. They didn't understand the process that was in motion.

“A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.” So some of his disciples said to one another, “What is this that he says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and, ‘because I am going to the Father’?” So they were saying, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.” John 16:16–18 (ESV)

The disciples just didn't understand. Thankfully, Jesus was patient with them and he is patient with us. Jesus went over the plan once again and let them know how things were about to go down.

Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, “Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, ‘A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me’? Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” John 16:19–22 (ESV)

“Here is the deal guys. Things are about to get bad. The world is about to fall apart. While your hearts are being torn out of your chest, the world around you will be cheering as I am taken away from you, which will make the pain much worse. That is not the end of the story. There is another chapter. Turn the page. Your sorrow will turn into joy. It will be the ultimate victory snatched out of the jaws of the greatest defeat,” Jesus said.

Jesus said it would be like a woman having a baby. When a woman is having a baby, she goes through incredible anguish, but in a moment’s notice, that anguish is transformed into joy.

When I read that, I could immediately connect. Not that I have given birth, but I have watched my wife go through labor three times. They say a woman’s first child is her hardest. That was definitely true for Cindy. With David, our first, Cindy was a few days overdue. The doctor brought her in, gave her an epidural to stop the pain and started cranking up the petosin. The problem is the epidural only worked on half of her body. The doctor sat on the end of the bed on his small stool looking like a catcher at home plate as he cranked up the petosin with my wife in agony. The more petosin he gave, the more Cindy was in pain, because the epidural wasn’t working on half of her body. Like a typical male, I saw a problem, so I thought I would fix it. In maternity class, they said that it might be helpful to rub your wife’s back while she was in labor. I couldn’t reach her back but her shoulder was near so I grabbed that and started rubbing. That was a bad idea. I didn’t realize she was in the middle of a contraction. In that moment, I saw a side of my wife I never saw before and have never seen since.

Even the doctor told me to step back. As a husband, I was standing at least six feet away from Cindy and checking my hand to make sure I still had all my fingers. I have to admit, I was hurt. I was just trying to help.

A few minutes later, David was born. I cut his cord and looked at Cindy. I know a woman's mood can change in a moment's notice, but this took the cake. She was just beaming --- exhausted, but beaming. She was full of happiness because she was a mother. In the meantime, I was still wondering if it was safe to touch her.

This is what Jesus said. "Guys, you are about to go through a time of terrible agony as you watch me beaten, disfigured and crucified while the world cheers. When it is all said and done, you are going to have incredible joy. A whole new world order is about to be born."

Now comes what I want to focus on. Jesus gave them, and us, an example of what this change would look like. The example he gave is prayer.

Jesus explained everything was about to change, for example, their prayers.

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. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. John 16:23–24 (ESV)

You see, up to this point, when the disciples had a need, they talked to Jesus. It was obvious Jesus was a little closer to God than they were. Not only did they pray to God the Father, I am sure they talked with God the Son. Jesus prepared them for his departure. Soon, instead of talking to Jesus about their needs, they would be able to talk to God the Father with a new directness they

didn't have. All they needed to do was bring their needs to God the Father in Jesus' name and God the Father would take care of them.

This is an impressive promise, but it raises questions. Is this blank check promise Jesus gave just for the disciples or is it also for us? Does it mean that we simply need to append the phrase, "in the name of Jesus" to the end of our prayers to make them come true like saying abra-ca-dabra or shazam? What about the times when two people pray for two different outcomes in the name of Jesus? The farmer prays for rain in the name of Jesus and the Sunday School teacher prays for sun for the church picnic in the name of Jesus. Which one does God answer?

If we could understand this verse, it would revolutionize the way we pray. First, while Jesus' promise is directed specifically to the disciples, it is also directed to us. If it didn't apply to us, why would the apostle John tell us about it? What does it mean to pray in Jesus' name?

While it is not wrong to add the phrase, "in Jesus' name" to the end of our prayers, prayer in Jesus' name is much more than simply adding a tag line. Here are a few dimensions to it.

Prayer in Jesus' name means: Prayer that comes to God through Jesus alone.

At dinner this week, I asked my kids what they thought it meant to pray in Jesus' name. This was their answer. It is a good one. Up to that time, nobody prayed in Jesus' name to God the Father. For us, approaching God the Father only through Christ the Son may sound obvious, but for the disciples, this was revolutionary. They never prayed in Jesus' name before because Jesus was with

them. After the resurrection, they were about to understand what Jesus had done for them to bring them to God, not just eternally but in a daily prayer relationship.

As we open the lens up a bit we find prayer in Jesus' name means more than just approaching God the Father through Jesus alone.

Praying in Jesus' name means: Asking that God's will be done if it is different than my will.

Bible scholars point out there is a similar blank check prayer in the Letters of John to the ones given in the Gospel of John. Rather than praying in Jesus' name, the requirement of the prayer is praying in God's will. Many Bible scholars think they are one and the same.

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. 1 John 5:14–15 (ESV)

It is not wrong to talk to God about our desires for our kids' futures or our desires for marriage or a particular job. God loves when we talk with him about those things. As we pray, praying in Jesus' name is acknowledging that we want God's will in a situation more than we want our will. Should we tell God our desires? Of course! Praying in Jesus' name is telling God we want him to answer our requests according to his will and for his glory more than we want our requests answered according to our wishes.

I think the best example of this is Christ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane.

And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."
Matthew 26:39 (ESV)

Praying in Jesus's name is not just prayer that submits to God's will. It is also not praying for things that are outside of God's will. Don't pray to not get caught for tax evasion when you aren't reporting your taxes. Don't pray that you can date a cute guy who doesn't love Jesus. You know God's will is that you don't date him in the first place. Don't pray for that.

What about things that are not clearly right or wrong? If God promises to grant requests that are inside of the fence of his will, how do we know what his will is on something that is not biblically clear? Should I buy a used car or take out a loan for a new car? What is God's will for my life for college? Should I go or should I work? If I go, which college should I attend? Those are questions for which it is hard to know what God's will is for our lives. What should we do? This is when we turn to the Holy Spirit. When we pray, we tell God our desires, but then we ask the Holy Spirit to conform our desires to God's desires for our lives. Say "please transform my heart's desires to be in line with God's desires for my life." You will find that over time, he will do this. He will change our desires to be in line with God's will.

Praying in Jesus' name means: Prayer for the mission.

This week, as I studied, I had some important insight into what it means to pray in Jesus' name. There are three times this blank check prayer in Jesus' name is talked about in the Gospel of John, in addition to the two times in John 16 that we are looking at this morning.

“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. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” John 14:12–14 (ESV)

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. John 15:7–8 (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. John 15:16 (ESV)

What I noticed is these blank check prayers were all given by Jesus in the context of the Upper Room Discourse. The context is very important. In the Upper Room, Jesus prepared his disciples for the mission of reconciling the world to God. These blank checks are where God promises to give us anything we need to continue the mission.

These are not blank checks from God promising he will remove all suffering from our lives if we would simply ask. All but one of the apostles died a martyr’s death. They are not blank checks for a new car or to lose 10 pounds if we simply have faith and prayer. All of them were given under the heading of continuing Christ’s mission of reconciling people to God.

Look at John 14. The blank check section is a blank check promise that God the Father will answer our prayers for Jesus’ name to become more famous through our lives. That is a guaranteed affirmative answer to that prayer.

In John 15, this blank check prayer promise deals with fruitfulness. Bearing fruit means our lives will not just mark time but will make a difference for Christ in this world. When we ask God to help us bear fruit, he promises he will come through. Guys, that means when we ask God to help us bear the fruit of

the spirit and treat our wife more like Christ would, he will answer that prayer.

When we ask God to help us lead others in our Life Groups to love Christ more, God will answer that prayer. That is because it is a prayer to be fruitful.

What about those times when it appears God doesn't come through? We pray to bring glory to Christ's name and live a fruitful life but everything crashes and burns?

One of my heroes is Eric Liddell. I read more of his biographies than anyone else. I have a section on my bookshelf dedicated to him. I love that he was an amazing athlete who loved Jesus. He ran in the 1924 Olympics. He didn't run in the event he trained for because it was on a Sunday. He felt that honoring God was more important than winning a gold so he chose not to compete. Instead, they arranged for him to compete in an event he never trained for. He won the gold anyway, which I find amazing. Winning a gold medal in an event you never trained for is one of those unrepeatable moments in history. His other dream was that he wanted to return to where he grew up and be a missionary to China. His constant prayer was that he would bring glory to Christ's name and be fruitful for Christ in China. That sounds like the kind of prayer God guarantees to answer.

After winning the Olympics, he returned to China as a missionary. His life went nowhere. The Japanese invaded China. They put Eric in a prison camp where he eventually died of a brain tumor shortly before the camp was liberated. His life appeared to be a waste. So much for answered prayers of fruitfulness

and bringing glory to Christ in China. Did God fail to keep his word or was there more to the story?

Stories eventually leaked from behind those morbid prison walls. Eric took upon himself the care of the children in the camp. He set out to be their encourager and to teach them about Jesus in a world filled with depravity and pain.

One story I read told of how a young man acquired a knife. He slipped away from the group intending to take his life. Eric followed him and talked him out of suicide. After the war, that man went on to train hundreds of pastors and missionaries in China. Another biographer writes that in the prison camp was Jim Taylor, the great-grandson of Hudson Taylor and Steve Metcalf. Eric Liddell helped them make it through those dark days before he died. Jim Taylor went on to lead a mission organization that sent more than 900 missionaries to China. Steve Metcalf went on to lead a mission organization that sent hundreds of missionaries to Japan.¹

I have a question. Did God answer Eric Liddell's prayers for a fruitful life in China? Yes! God answered those prayers in a way nobody, including Eric, expected. Praying in Jesus' name means God will answer our prayers for fruitfulness but he may do it in a way we don't expect.

Praying in Jesus Name means: Praying with confidence that we are loved by God the Father.

"I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the

¹ David J. Michell, "After the Gold," *Heart Values*, available at www.heartvalues.com/eric_Liddell_after_the_gold.html (2004), 4.

Father. 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; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.” John 16:25–27 (ESV)

Probably one of the most devastating feelings, especially for men, is a lack of assurance that their father loves them. Adult men and women can become workaholics to gain the love of their parents. One of the most stressful things is the disapproval of our parents.

While the disciples loved God the Father, I think they were distancing themselves from him. In their minds, God the Father was unapproachable. They thought of fire and brimstone on Mt. Sinai. They thought of the holy of holies and being struck dead if someone wasn't the high priest. They thought of Uzzah steadying the ark and being struck dead because he touched it. Up to this point, when the disciples needed something, they talked to Jesus asking him to pray for them. Jesus was the middle man. They were wondering what would happen when Jesus was gone. Jesus just told them, “God the Father loves you.” Those who love Jesus are adored by God the Father.

I love the way Jesus said this. “You do not need to go through me like I am a middle man. You do not need to pray to Mary or pray to some obscure dead saint. You pray directly to the Father knowing that he loves you.”

Praying in the name of Jesus means praying with the confidence that God loves us more than we can imagine.

You see, a whole new world was about to be born. Everything was about to change.

The disciples thought they finally understood.

“I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.” His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.” Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” John 16:28–33 (ESV)

The disciples took their vote. They claimed that because Jesus was finally speaking clearly, he must be God. “We are all in. We finally understand.”

I don’t know if you detected Jesus’ sarcasm. “Do you now believe? Do you really? In a few moments the hour will be upon us and the world is going to fall apart, just like I told you, and every one of you will run for the hills. I will be in my darkest hour, all alone, with nothing but my Father standing with me.”

As I thought about this, what struck me is Jesus was about to go to the cross and experience the most hideous death the Roman world could invent. He was about to experience the full wrath of God the Father against his disciples’ sins and my sins. As he faced this, he knew the disciples he was dying for were about to ditch him. He loved them and died for them anyway.

Many times we are just like the disciples. We ditch Christ but he loves us and he dies for us anyway. Christ is so amazing. When we are faithless, he is faithful. He does for us what we don’t deserve.

Conclusion

One of the things I like to do after I study a text is that after I understand the “so what?” I like to ask the question, “Now what.” Now what should we do with this? Here are four practical take-aways for the week.

1. If I love Jesus, be confident that God the Father has a special love for me. I can approach God the Father, in the name of Jesus, knowing he wants to hear my prayers.
2. God guarantees to answer my prayers for fruitfulness and bringing glory to Christ.
3. When I pray in Jesus’ name, I submit my will to God’s will for the way he chooses to answer my prayers.
4. If I am praying to be fruitful, *take bold steps expecting God will keep his word and make me fruitful.*

As a church, we are preparing to open another campus in Spencer. We don’t have all the cash or the answers but we are moving forward in Jesus’ name, asking God to help us be a fruitful church that births other campuses for Jesus. For it to work, God has to show up. It is that simple. We are moving forward with confidence that he will show up and keep his blank check promises even though we don’t know how it will all come together. We are confident it will.

As we close in prayer, we thank you, Jesus, for these bold prayers you tell us to pray. We thank you that you promise to answer prayers for fruitful lives. We come before you with our next campus in Spencer. We ask that you would continue to give Pastor Jordan wisdom and that you would continue to gather that crowd and form them into a congregation. We ask that you would help us to be a church that reaches into our region and spreads the Gospel all around us. We know there will be unexpected twists and turns in how you answer our prayers, but we are confident you will answer them. Amen.



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