Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Probably, the biggest question for most people in relation to prayer is: Why have I not gotten what I prayed for? And I don’t mean this in relation to asking for a new Ferrari or a new wardrobe from Country Road and a spa treatment; I trust that none of us pray like that or expect requests like that to be given; I mean prayers for healing or the conversion of a loved one or someone to marry or relief from persecution or affliction. And these are prayers that many of us are praying, right now. But we or the person we are praying about has not gotten what we have asked for. Why not?

And making this even harder to understand is a passage like this one in John. Looking to passages like this, the believer asks, often with agonized tears, where is the answer to *my* prayer? It says here that whatever I ask in His name He will do, which I have done, repeatedly, but, no joy. So, does the believer who complains about his or her unanswered prayer have a legitimate complaint against John 14:13-14?

Well, what is obvious about these verses is that in them **Jesus makes a prayer promise**. But to understand His prayer promise, we need to spend time considering the **context** of the promise and then the **content** of the promise. So, they will be the two sections of the sermon – the context and the content.

1. So, let’s begin with the **context** of Jesus’ Prayer Promise.
   1. It is the night of Jesus’ arrest. He has had the last Supper with His disciples, He has washed their feet, He has spoken about His imminent betrayal and told Peter that he will deny Jesus three times before the rooster crows. Now, the other three Gospels move immediately to the Garden of Gethsemane. But John tells us about what has come to be known as the **Upper room discourse** – chapters 14-17 – a long talk in which Jesus comforts and encourages and teaches and prays for His disciples. And Brothers and sisters, let me start by encouraging you to meditate often on John 14-17.
      1. My guess is that most of us, if we have a shower and a bath, use the bath a lot less than we do the shower. And showers are good. I am sure that the person sitting next to you on the pew is very grateful that you regularly shower! So, think about your daily Bible reading as a shower – a regular cleansing by the Word. But you know, it is worthwhile, every now and then, to take a bath in a passage like John 14-17. It is a place that you don’t want to quickly skip in and out of and get the job done, but a place to linger and soak. And John 14-17 is like that; it is such a rich and beautiful passage that is worth regularly meditating on.
   2. The chapter 14 opens with Jesus telling the disciples that it was time for Him to go. But He would soon come again and take the disciples to be with Him. Now, He meant ‘go to His Father in heaven,’ but the disciples didn’t understand. All they heard was that He was going. So, Thomas basically asked Him for the GPS co-ordinates so they could put it into Google Maps and meet Him there later. But Jesus didn’t give them GPS co-ordinates; He said, “**I am the way**, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Call to Faith. Belief. Relationship. Well, this was too much for Philip. He said, “Show us the Father!” Philip wanted proof! And Jesus seems almost astonished at Philip’s response. Don’t you know me yet? Believe in me! Believe that I and the Father are one.
   3. And His next words are really important for our text; Jesus basically said, If just believing in Me is too much for you, you have seen the feeding of the 5000 and the walking on water and the raising of Lazarus from the dead. And you know that only the Father can do miracles like those. So, “*believe on account of the works themselves*.” He pointed them to His **works**/**miracles**.
   4. And that brings us to **verse 12**. And you cannot understand verses 13-14 apart from verse 12; they are connected. For notice that they both mention “*works*.” And so, having spoken about His own works/miracles, Jesus says, “*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*.” And with these words Jesus wanted the disciples to see that His going to the Father would actually unleash an even **greater relationship** *with* them and a **greater work** *in and through* them than His staying could accomplish.
      1. Now, you might be thinking, how could the disciples do **greater** works than what Jesus did? I mean, what could be greater than raising Lazarus from the dead?
      2. Well, the word ‘greater’ is not meant as in how we score ice skaters, for example. Jesus is not saying I got 5.5 for artistry and 5.7 for skill and 5.3 for complexity and you will get straight sixes! No, Jesus is saying that His work was done at whichever spot He was physically located at in Israel. One man/one location. And His work was confined mainly to the Jews, who, by and large, rejected Jesus.
      3. But after Jesus died and rose and ascended to heaven, and poured out His Holy Spirit on the disciples, what happened?
         1. Well, think of Pentecost Day. Peter preaches one sermon and what happens? 3000 Jewish believers were added to the church in one day! And soon after that we are told that there were 5000 men in the church. And then large numbers of priests believed. And then large numbers of Samaritan men and women. And then, an Ethiopian eunuch. And boom goes the gospel into Gentile lands via the apostles.
         2. And we read of the lame walking and the blind receiving their sight and the dead being raised, by the Apostles. So, they did the same works Jesus did. We even read of people being healed just by the shadow of the apostles, or by touching a handkerchief that belonged to them!
      4. So, because there many Apostles, who were in many locations, who lived on the other side of the cross, and were indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that they did greater works than Jesus did. Do you see?
2. So, now that we have the context in view, we can consider the **content** of Jesus’ prayer promise in vv13-14. Jesus says, “*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*.” And we will look at this promise using four words that begin with the letter R – **Relationship**, **Reassurance**, **Result**, and **Revelation**.
   1. Firstly then, **relationship**. And by this I mean the relationship of these verses to what Jesus has just said. You see, the very first word of verse 13 in the original language, Greek, translates as “**and**.” The NIV begins the verse with “And,” and it is a shame that the ESV doesn’t, because that little word “and” links what is said in verse 13 to what Jesus just said about the greater work that the apostles will do as Spirit-filled followers of Christ. So, we cannot isolate verses 13-14 as a stand-alone promise that we can pull out of Scripture that applies to *all* people at *all* times and in *every* way.
      1. Let me illustrate what I mean. Imagine that a few of you high school students are talking with me about an upcoming Christian studies exam. And I say to you, “Study these topics and those textbooks, and you will be ready. But if you do that and you still do not feel confident, well, you know where I am. And I will do whatever you ask.” That is not me saying I will do absolutely anything you might ask me, that is me saying, to you high school students, that I will help you get ready for the test in any way that I can.
      2. And in the same way, the “and” that begins verse 13 connects it to the Apostles and with what Jesus has just been discussing with them about doing greater works than He had done. Jesus was not making a general and universal promise that so long as any believer prays for something and adds the words “in Jesus’ name” on the end, He will do it or give it; Jesus was telling the Apostles that God would hear and answer the prayers that *they* offered in *their* work as *His* *official* *ambassadors*.
   2. And that leads us into the second aspect of this promise, which is **reassurance**. You see, these words were not new words to the disciples; they had heard them before. In **Matthew 7:7**, for example,Jesus said, “*Ask and it will be given to you*.” So, let’s turn to **Acts 4:24** where we see one example of the fruit of Jesus’ reassurance to the Apostles.
      1. Peter and John had been released by the Sanhedrin after being warned not to preach in Jesus’ name. So, they went to the church and told them all that had happened, and we read, “*They lifted their voices together to God and said,* ‘*Sovereign Lord* … [and then down to verse 29] *grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus*.”
      2. And what happened? “*And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak spoke the word of God with boldness*.”
      3. And we may be sure that similar prayers were prayed by Peter on the Day of Pentecost, and when he and John were with the lame man, and by Philip in Samaria, and before he got into the Ethiopian’s chariot, and so on and so on. And each prayer was answered.
      4. As the Apostles remembered the reassuring words of Jesus’ prayer promise and brought each opportunity to advance the kingdom of Jesus Christ to God in prayer, it was answered!
   3. And this is where we need to notice the third aspect of this prayer promise, which is the **result or purpose**. For Jesus said, “*Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son*.”
      1. Later on in chapter 17, Jesus prays, Father, “*I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do*.” So, everything that Jesus did while on earth had as its goal, not Jesus’ personal comfort or career goals or relationship aims, but glorifying the Father. And what Jesus wanted His disciples to yearn for and work for was that the Father might be glorified in the Son.
      2. And so, what we find as we read the epistles, over and over again, is words like, “*To him be the glory forever!*” “*To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ*!” “*For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God*.” “*All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people* *may cause thanksgiving to overflow* *to the glory of God*.”
      3. So, their ultimate goal in their prayer requests was the glory of God.
   4. And that brings us, fourthly, to the **revelation** in these verses. And it is a twofold revelation.
      1. First, from **verse 1**3, the Apostles were to pray to the Father “*in my name*.”
         1. Since creation, God’s people had prayed to God. But now they were to pray to Him in the name of Jesus. This was huge! This was a massive mindshift for the Jews! To do this was to recognize that Jesus is God and to glorify Him and the Father. And we know how huge this was because it is the reason why Christians were accused of blasphemy by the Jews. How could you tell someone was a Christian? Just listen to their prayers. If they prayed *in the name of Jesus*, they were Christians. So, Jesus was giving new revelation; a new pattern of prayer. After He ascended to heaven, they were to recognize His person and work by praying in His name.
      2. But then comes the second part of the revelation in **verse 14**. And it is equally stunning. For not only were they to pray to the Father in Jesus’ name, they could also address their prayers directly to Jesus! “*If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it*.” And this makes perfect sense when we think it through:
         1. Who are we to worship? God. Is Jesus God? Yes. Then He is owed worship. He is worthy of worship. And this truth is a vital proof of the **Trinity**. If Jesus calls on us to pray to Him, then He must be fully God.
         2. And what is also true is that the heart of Christianity is not about believing a set of doctrines but **relationship**. We are in relationship or communion with Jesus Christ. And a key part of relationship is communication. Husband/wife, parent/child, friends, workmates, schoolmates, siblings, teammates – if any in these relationships said they did not talk to each other, then we would say that the relationship is in trouble at the very least.
         3. And so, it’s not surprising to hear Stephen pray in **Acts 7**, “*Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit [and] do not hold this sin against them,*” and to hear Paul pray, in **1 Timothy 1:12**, “*I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He judged me faithful, appointing me to His service*.”

So, this prayer promise was given, first and foremost, to the Apostles. And the promise was kept, as we have seen. But the promise was not just for the Apostles. Indeed, in **verse 12**, Jesus says, “*Whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do*…”

* 1. So, if you have believed in Jesus Christ, which means that you have confessed your sins, repented of your sins, and believed that He died and rose again for the forgiveness of your sins, then you too are a disciple of Jesus. And this promise is also for you!
     1. Using the illustration I mentioned before about students preparing for a Christian studies exam. If that group of students went and told other students that I had offered to help students prepare for the exam anyway that I could, then those students would also have every reason to expect that they could receive help from me based on my promise. And the Apostles wrote these words down, so that we too would know the promise of Jesus!
  2. Now, unlike them, we are not given the gift of performing miracles. God can perform miracles, but the time of miracles was for the time when the New Testament had not yet been written. But just like the Apostles, we are to share the gospel with others. The way that Holy Spirit brings people to faith in Christ is through the official preaching of Christ’s ministers and the gospel-sharing of each one of us. So, we may all lay claim to this promise and ask God to give us opportunities to share the gospel, and for wisdom and courage to do so, and for Him to make hearts ready to receive Christ, trusting that He will answer that prayer!
  3. But we must do this **that God might be glorified**. The preacher and commentator, James Montgomery Boice, makes the following observation on these words. He said, “This is a new thought for many people, for we are so filled with the idea that prayer is getting something from God, that we rarely consider that prayer is actually a means by which God gets something from us. What He wants from us is glory, a glory that will lead others to trust in Him.”
     1. And **Paul** is a perfect example of this. In 2 Cor. 12 he said, “*To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*” You see, Paul though God’s glory would be better served by the thorn being removed, but he learned that God was more glorified through the thorn remaining.
     2. **Joni Erickson-Tada** is another example of this. She became a quadriplegic. She went to healing meeting after healing meeting. She thought, Imagine what a great testimony I could give if I was healed! But then she came to see that she could glorify God as a quadriplegic.
     3. And similarly, God’s glory might best be served through Him not giving you what you are asking of Him.
     4. But consider **Hannah**, also, who we read of earlier. For years, God’s glory was served best through her not being able to conceive, despite her prayers. But then, one day, God’s glory was served best through the gift of a son, according to her prayers.

So, may we pray for healing? Yes. May we pray for a marriage partner? Yes. May we pray for a child? Yes. May we pray for our wayward children? Yes.

But let us not do so waiving the guarantee of John 14:13-14 in God’s face, saying, “You promised!” Let us instead pray for all things, that God may be glorified. For true joy comes not when we get what we want, but when God is glorified in and through us.

This, brothers and sisters, young people and boys and girls,is Jesus’ prayer promise. Amen.