

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Rogate, May 14, 2023

Readings: Numbers 21:4–9, 1 Timothy 2:1-6, John 16:23–33

The Father Answers Our Prayers Because of Jesus

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you” (John 16:23). To pray in Jesus’ name is to pray as one who has been baptized. For it is in the water that He put His name upon you, claiming you as His own, making you a son of God with access to the Father. By His incarnation and crucifixion, our Lord Jesus broke through the barrier of sin which separated us from God, opening a portal to the Father. To pray in Jesus’ name is to pray with faith in Him as the one Mediator between God and men, who gave Himself a ransom for all (1 Tim. 2:1–6). Like Moses in the wilderness, Jesus is our go-between and intercessor before the throne of heaven. He was lifted up for us on the cross that we might be saved and restored to fellowship with the Father (Num. 21:4–9). Looking into this perfect teaching of liberty (James 1:22–27) we pray with boldness and confidence as dear children of God.

Sermon Transcript:

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We're going to start with the Numbers passage, one of the best foreshadowings and foreknowledge of what is going to happen in Jesus Christ. Besides the Passover, this is the most vivid image of what Jesus Christ is going to do. This prepares us for His coming. Jesus Himself says, "Just like the serpent was raised in the wilderness, so also will the Son of Man be raised on a tree." And so we have Jesus claiming that if we understand what's going on in this story, in this section of history, we'll have a better understanding of what Jesus Christ Himself was doing.

So let's look at the context and what's going on. So the Israelites are wandering around in the desert and they're trying to avoid Edom, which is a nation that's in that area sort of east of Israel, east of the Jordan River. And they're not exactly on friendly terms with the people of Israel. So they're trying to avoid their nation, trying to avoid war. In the meantime, they have to wander a long ways around. And the Israelites, to our great surprise, start grumbling. Okay, not very big surprise. That's their favorite pastime is to grumble and complain against God. And what do they say? What do they grumble about? There's no food. There's no water. Oh, by the way, we hate this worthless food. Either there's no food or there is food. They don't seem to know what they're complaining about. They just want to complain because it's not going the way they want.

Now, that should sound vaguely familiar to the rest of us. How often do we complain about something, anything because it's not going the way we want it. And we may not be very rational in our complaints because we're actually complaining about how we feel, not necessarily about the situation at hand. Because did they have food? Absolutely. God gave it to them every single day. They are complaining about bread from heaven. It's a miracle that they see every single day and they're complaining that it's worthless. They're complaining basically that God doesn't know what He's doing, that God has abandoned them to die in the wilderness. Like He did all of those miracles and plagues in Egypt, parted the Red Sea, let them pass through on dry land, gave them the 10 Commandments, giving them manna, water from a rock, quail when they want it. And yet still, He doesn't care about them. He just wants them to die.

Again, unfortunately, that sounds vaguely familiar. Whenever anything, any hardship happens in our own lives, what are we pretty quick to do? "God, why me? Why is this happening to me?" Like it's some strange thing that we go through hardship in this world. I mean, just look at the way Jesus ends the passage. "In the world, you will have tribulation." We kind of stop right there half the time and say, "Ah, woe is me. How awful is it?" We forget "But take heart, I have overcome the world." What are we doing when we're grumbling and

complaining? We're basically saying, "God, You don't know what's best for me." We're saying, "God, You're not smart enough or clever enough, or You're not paying attention well enough to know what it is that I want and I need." It's really idolatry saying, I know better than You God what I need, what I want, what is most important for me. So you can imagine the God got a little bit frustrated when the Israelites were this complaining. So He sends these serpents into the field and they start biting people. People start dying. And then finally they go, "Oh God, we've sinned. Please take these snakes from us." This should help us understand sometimes the trials and tribulations that come into our life. Not all of them, some of them are just a result that we live in a fallen, broken world. And so therefore, fallen, broken things happen. Until Christ comes again, that is the state of this world. But sometimes we create our own tribulations. Sometimes we create our own problems and God allows that to happen, so that He might have us turn to His Word for our hope and our comfort. You see, we as Christians can recognize that any situation in our life can be and is for the glory of God, properly understood. It may not be pleasant for us to go through the tribulations of this world, the trials, the heartaches, the diseases, the accidents, and whatever else we might face.

But as a Christian, we know that God works all things together for good. And we know that even these tribulations and trials, God can work for our benefit because they can help us understand how much God cares for us. How often have we looked back at a particularly trying period of our life and looking back, we can see how God guided us and carried us through these trials. We may not always see it in the midst of it, but looking back, we very often see, there, by the grace of God, God brought us through. Now, if He brought us through once, why are we so absolutely convinced He's not going to do it again? See, that's the struggle. That's the message. God allowed the serpents to go in there, to teach them, to draw them back to His Word. Then He made the fiery serpent, put it on a pole and said, "Anybody looking at this serpent will live." The serpent didn't have magical powers, healing powers, but the Word of God did. And if we believe the Word, it will do what He says it will do. So much so that Jesus says, "You don't need to ask for anything from me. You can go directly to the Father in My name and He will give it to you."

Anything that we ask of God, He will give in Jesus' name. Well, we need to understand what that means. More often than not, we think if we're going to ask God for something, we think about ourselves. God, I need this and that and the other thing. God, please make this thing work out in my life. God, please guide my path and make sure it's easy and straight and not too complicated. We pray for ourselves. We pray for our own interests, and we expect that God will answer according to the way we want it to work out.

See, here's the key. The disciples thought that they understood this. Jesus is saying, ask anything in the Father and He will give it because He loves you. And the disciples are going, oh, I get it. You're speaking plainly now. We've got it all figured out. That's why we trusted in You, because You speak plainly and we're going to ask and You're going to make our life smooth and easy and everything's going to go well. I mean, I think that's kind of what the disciples are thinking. We understand You. You have said we can ask God and He will make everything good. And Jesus says, "Oh, really? You believe now? There's going to come a time really soon where you're going to scatter. You're going to abandon Me. You're going to leave Me alone, but I am not alone because the Father is with Me." You see, we often think that God is answering our prayers when things go well in our lives according to human standards. The fact of the matter is God answers our prayers at all times, even when things go poorly for us. Because in this world, you will have tribulation and nobody gets out of this world alive, but God is still with us. And God promises to never leave us nor forsake us. He promises to give us peace that surpasses all understanding. You see, we know what the world does not know. We know that this is not our home. Our hope is not in the here and the now. And so if the here and the now is difficult, we just see that as God refining us, teaching us how faithful He is, how strong He is, and how much He is able to carry us through the hard times and to bring us to the hope and the promise of everlasting life.

I don't want to be on this world when my body's giving out and things aren't working quite right, and I'm aches and pains and all these struggles. I want to be in a place where I'm restored and when I get to see God face to face and not be afraid. That's the hope. So to live as Christ, to die is gain. If it goes well, blessed be the name of

the Lord. If it's challenging, blessed be the name of the Lord because He has not just called us to pray to Him for our own benefit. Timothy says, "We're to pray for our kings and rulers and others in high position. We're to ask God to protect them and to guide them that we might lead peaceful and quiet lives." We're called to pray for others. We're called to interact with others because we know that in the midst of our tribulation, God is with us. But this world doesn't know that.

All this world sees is tribulation and trial and eat, drink, and be merry. For tomorrow, we die. And that's it. But we know there's a next stage, a next place. And so we live in this world so that we might bear witness in the hardship of the love of God. So that others might know the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding. That is what we pray for. That is what we ask for in God's name. Not for our own selves only, but for the rest of the world and even for our kings and rulers. Even the kings and rulers that we disagree with, even the kings and rulers who don't seem to have the best interests in mind. We pray that God would work in spite of them to create a peaceful world. And whether they be a democratic government or a fascist government or a communist government or a monarchy or whatever other institution there might be of leadership, we pray that God would be with our leaders so that we might be free to bear witness to the hope of God. And we can do that even in the midst of trials and tribulation and even persecution.

So that's what we're praying for. We're praying for a much bigger picture. Not just that I would be fat, dumb, and happy, but that I would be trained and equipped for every good work so that others might know the peace and the grace and the love of God. Because Christ gave Himself as a ransom for all. He is our mediator. He talks to the Father on our behalf. He answers our prayers before we even ask, and He gives purpose and meaning to everything in our lives, even the hardships, even the trials. So remember this, in this world you will have tribulation. But take heart, Christ has overcome the world, and you are His child.

May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.