

Pastor:

I'm going to start with the Gospel lesson. Jesus is declaring to His disciples that they will not ask Him of anything, but they'll ask the Father directly. Now, how in the world are they going to be able to ask the Father directly? In our lesson in the Bible study in Hebrews this Sunday, we were talking about how when God spoke to the people of Israel on Mount Sinai, the earth shook and everybody was afraid. Nobody wanted to hear the voice of God directly. Everybody wanted some distance between them and the voice of God. And here Jesus is saying, "You're not going to just talk to me. You're going to talk directly to the Father, because the Father loves you because you have loved me."

So here we have the reason why we can come to the Father and not be afraid because Christ is now our intermediary. We don't need anybody else but Jesus Christ. We don't need to go through anybody else but Christ, because Christ has promised that the Father actually listens to us because He loves us. Now, God has always loved us, but the law of God demanded a payment, and that payment was the death of Christ on the cross. So without the death of Christ, even though God loves us, we do have to suffer the punishment of sin. But because Christ came and brought that punishment upon Himself for all of humanity, we are free from that fear. We no longer hear the voice of God and shake in fear. We're still in awe of that God. We still are reverent towards that God, but we are not afraid. We fear God. As you properly fear somebody who is in authority over you, you respect them, you honor them, you listen to them, but we are not afraid. There's a difference. We're not afraid of God because we know he loves us.

Now, the disciples heard all of this and they're like, "This is great news. Finally, you're saying something that makes sense. You've been talking in parables and riddles for all these years and we were not really completely certain what you were saying all the time, but now you're speaking plainly. Now we believe. This is why we believe. Because we understand and we know that you know all things and you don't never need to be questioned." They were pretty polled in their declaration because they didn't have a clue what was coming next. This is before the betrayal of Judas. This is before the Garden of Gethsemane. This is before the crucifixion.

So they're hearing Jesus talk, and they've been following Him for all this time, and they're like, "Yes. You're going to come into power and authority and we're going to have this direct relationship with God. Everything's going to be good. Where all of our hard work of following after you and listening after you and serving you, all of that's going to be paying off. And we really do believe, because now we understand." Or so they thought.

Jesus, on the other hand says, "You don't yet get it. You don't yet understand what's going on. This is not going to be all roses and pleasantries and good things. This is going to be hard. You're going to suffer. Many of you are going to die for your faith. And in fact, you're going to be so confident that you believe in me that when I'm betrayed, you're going to scatter. You're going to run away. You don't understand yet."

They were not yet filled with the Holy Spirit. They did not yet fully understand what was going on. They were still looking for their own ideas of what God was going to do. They were looking for their own desires to be fulfilled. When Jesus said, "Ask my Father and He will give it to you.", they were still to some degree thinking about what they thought was important. And to some degree, we still do the same thing. How many times when we pray to God and we ask Him to solve our problem, to give us peace, or to provide for this need or that want, how often are we asking God for things that we think are important? Things that we want to work out?

How often do we pray, "God, I don't want to suffer this anymore. You work it out. God, I don't want to deal with this anymore. Please make it go away."? How often do we pray for our own desires rather than God's desires? You see, we can ask for anything directly to the Father in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and know that He will answer our prayer. The thing is, He doesn't always answer the way we like, or hope, or want. Because we want things to be easy. We don't want to suffer. We don't want to have to go through hard times and tribulation. But yet in this world of sin and brokenness, we can't get away from it.

And so, to ask to be taken away from this is to be asked to be taken out of this world. The only way that we are no longer going to suffer trials and tribulations is if we die. Now as a Christian, we can indeed actually pray that prayer. Lord, if it is your will, let me die today. But if not, let me serve you and seek your will. The only way we lose and get rid of our tribulations is when He comes again, either on our last day or the last day. Until that time, we will have tribulation. As Christ says, "In this world, you will have tribulation."

Now, why does Jesus follow this up with the first part where He said, "Ask to the Father in my name and He's going to give it to you."? Because He wants the disciples to understand the reality. They're going to face the worst time of their lives. They're going to abandon their master, their teacher, their savior. They're going to scatter, they're going to reject Him. They're going to deny Him before men. They were all confident at this point, but it all slipped away when the rubber hit the road, in other words.

And so now Jesus is trying to reassure them. "In this world you will have tribulation. Even though you have abandoned me, I have not abandoned you." So He wants them to be realistic about what it means to be a follower of Christ. What it means for us to be a follower of Christ. It's not going to be easy.

Paul was called to go to Macedonia, to Philippi. Now, what did God promise that was going to happen to Paul in every city that he went to? He was going to be imprisoned, and he was going to face trials and tribulations and afflictions. That was God's promise to Paul. Not it's going to be easy. Everybody's going to believe you. The church is going to grow dramatically and you're never going to have to suffer anything. No, you're going to have to suffer. Because people will not listen. People will not hear. And people will reject you. And this is the truth, and we need to understand that. But we also need to know that as the psalmist said in the psalm, "We can cast our burdens on the Lord and He will sustain us, and He will never permit the righteous to be moved."

You see, we have the promise that God will carry our burdens. That God will carry us in the midst of our trials and tribulations because He has overcome. Because He sustains us through the blood of His Savior, His son, Jesus Christ. And we know that there is a greater hope waiting for us than what is going on in this world. Jesus says, "In this world you will have tribulation." But then He says, "I have overcome the world." And then we hear in the book of Revelation what that overcoming looks like in its fullness. When the bride of Christ comes Jerusalem in all of its glory with the pearly gates, that's where we get the term from right here, those pearly gates that we have. With the names of the 12 tribes of Israel on the gates, that's the way we enter into our understanding of God is through, as we hear about God in the Old Testament, the fear of God and the law of God.

But what sustains us, what holds the city in place is the foundation, which is the Apostles. And which they teach the word of Christ, the salvation and the forgiveness of sins. See, when John is describing Jerusalem or seeing this Jerusalem descend from heaven in the new heavens and the new earth, what he's actually seen is our dwelling place. The city is not the bride of Christ. We who dwell in that city are the bride of Christ. We are His precious jewels. We are His precious people whom He loves, and forgives, and promises that He will wipe every tear from our eye. All the trials and tribulations that we face in this world will be wiped away when we see Him again face to face, when we get to dwell in this new Jerusalem.

Now it says that, "Nothing unclean will ever enter it nor anything that does what is detestable or false." As we heard last week with Peter and all the unclean animals and everybody that ate them were unclean, God declares clean what is unclean. So

what does it mean that He will not allow anything unclean? Are we unclean because we have failed to be perfect before God? Because we have not lived up to the standards? No, we are declared clean by God just as God declared all those animals clean for Peter. Declared the Gentiles clean, brought into the family of God.

Lydia being this believer in God, but not a Jew, but a believer who was led by the Holy Spirit to hear the message and to believe it, to be baptized, her and her whole family, and then to serve. Now, there was no reason for her to serve. She was a merchant of purple cloth, which was a very expensive process to create purple. Not everybody could buy it. You couldn't go to Walmart and just pick up something purple. Not everybody did that. Only kings and the very, very rich were able to afford the purple cloth. She had a life of ease. She was financially stable. But she was willing to serve God rather than cling to her wealth. She heard the message and it moved her. It changed her. The Holy Spirit guided her to serve, even though that was going to create more problems, not less, at least in this world.

And so, when we come to God and when we ask God to guide us, to help us, ask Him for anything, we don't ask Him for what we want. Rather, we ask Him for what He wants for us. See, we will face tribulation, but when we ask God, "God, what are you teaching me here? How are you guiding me here? What can I learn, or how can I be a witness in this situation?" That is the prayers that we ask in Jesus' name. "Thy will be done, not mine. Your will, not ours." That is the way to pray, and that is the understanding that God will answer and give us everything that we want. Because what we want, being filled with the Holy Spirit, is what God wants. That all people might know that they can go directly to the Father. Because through the Son, they have been forgiven all their sins.

Take heart. He has overcome the world. Take heart. He has overcome your problems. Take heart. He has overcome your tribulations. Take heart. He has overcome your failures and your sin, and He has forgiven you, and He has given you peace. You are the Bride of Christ and He loves you dearly. And welcomes you into that new Jerusalem, through the pearly gates, into the glorious mansions that He has prepared before all time for us to dwell in, that we might praise His name for all time.

You notice that when it describes the new Jerusalem and the new heavens and the new earth, there is no sun, because the Son of God brings light. And it says the gates are never closed during the day. And then it says there's never any night. In other words, the gates are always open. We are always free. In the new heavens, on the new earth, there is no fear. There is no condemnation, there is no sin, there is

no guilt. There's only the love of God for us and our love for Him. And what a glorious day that will be.

So in the meantime, cast your burdens on the Lord and He will sustain you. May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.