

**1 John 5:13-15**  
**By Grace I'm Saved**  
**Christian Prayer**

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**<sup>13</sup> I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. <sup>14</sup> This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. <sup>15</sup> And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.**

This morning we're entering into the fourteenth week of our Lutheran Doctrine series, *By Grace I'm Saved*. We've reviewed the history of God's grace and our salvation, the means through which He brings the gifts of His grace and salvation to us, and we've seen that those truths impact each of the three realms in which we live: home, society and, our Christian congregation. For the last four weeks of our series, this October, we're going to look at four final facets of a Christian's life: Christian Prayer, Christian Fellowship, Christian Stewardship, and finally a Christian's Mission—Evangelism.

Today we start with Christian prayer. As we look at the three short verses we have in front of us this morning from 1 John 5, the first one doesn't seem to have much to do with prayer.

In verse 13 John writes, **I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.** Sound familiar? It's almost exactly the same as the sentiment he leaves us at the end of his Gospel account: **These [things] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name** (Jn 20:31). John sums up what those "things" are in 1 John 5:11-12 **God has given us eternal life... in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life.**

It sounds pretty simple when you boil it all down like that. Life is God's gift to humanity and He gives it to them—to us—through Jesus and through Jesus alone. But what does that have to do with prayer? It might seem like not much. The word prayer isn't in any of those verses. The concept of prayer doesn't come up until verse 14 and we aren't there yet, but there is a pretty big connection, and in order to see it, we have to understand what prayer is.

Prayer, put very simply, is when a person speaks to God. As Christians we know that when we come to God in prayer it is, in essence, a child speaking to his or her Father. That's what enables us to pray confidently as we'll see when we get to verse 14, but God has not always been our Father. That is a relationship we have only through Jesus. He has, on the other hand, always been our king. So in another sense, prayer is when a human being steps into the heavenly court of the almighty Creator God for an audience with the King of kings. And while God has always been our king and is king over all, we have not always been perfect subjects.

In fact, far from it, when it comes to being subjects in God's kingdom about the only word that could aptly describe us is rebels. Our sinfulness—our rebellion against the one eternal King and His commands—had stripped us of any right to come before Him with our petitions. But then our king did something spectacularly amazing; He sent His Son Jesus to reconcile us to Him so that when He looks at us as His subjects He now sees the perfect faithfulness and

flawless obedience of Jesus. And more than that He sees His own dear children, born again into His family through water and the Spirit, through Word and Sacrament.

Because that amazing news has been proclaimed to us in the gospel, John continues in verse 14, **This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.** How *can* we pray? Because that is the distinct privilege that has been given to God's children—to those who have received life from Him in His Son.

How *should* we pray? That's a whole new question isn't it. When we come to God in prayer He wants us to do that with an appreciation of what we just discussed, both the relationship we had with Him as unworthy and rebellious subjects, and the new relationship He has given us through Jesus as dearly loved children. With those truths in mind when we come to God in prayer we do it with humility. *Merciful Father in heaven, I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child.*

Yet, in spite of that, knowing the new relationship we have with God through Jesus, we pray as John tells us here, confidently. *But trusting in Jesus, my Savior, I pray: Have mercy on me according to your unfailing love. Cleanse me from my sin and take away my guilt.* We do that as we gather for worship here each week, opening our service with a prayer of humble confidence. And then God answers that prayer through the words of His servant, *God, our heavenly Father, has been merciful to you, and has given His only Son to be the atoning sacrifice for your sins. Therefore, by His authority, I forgive you your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.* To which your response is what? Amen! Confidence! Even as we humbly admit that we don't deserve it, we trust wholeheartedly that it is true because our God has proclaimed it to us in His Word.

Our God wants humble and confident prayer, and He also wants persistence. We had one example of persistent prayer in Abraham's prayer in our Old Testament lesson. When Jesus gave us His example for how we ought to pray, He included as a part of His model, **Give us today our daily bread.** God doesn't want us to come to Him on January 1, ask for earthly and spiritual blessings for another year, and then leave it at that until next year. He doesn't want us praying to Him as we gather here with our siblings in Christ and then waiting until next Sunday until we come to Him again. He wants us coming to Him every day with our praise and our thanks and our petitions.

While we're on the subject of the Lord's Prayer, we also want our prayers to God to be heartfelt. Some people have referred to the Lord's Prayer as the greatest martyr in the church. Once we have anything committed to memory it can be easy to recite it without considering what we're saying. We don't want that to happen with our prayers. This is our marvelous opportunity to come into the heavenly court of the King of the Universe, so we want our whole heart to be in it! So every once in a while, we sing a nine stanza hymn or spend two months of Sunday School to help us remember what we're asking in that prayer. Another good exercise, with any of the prayers we have committed to memory, is on occasion to put it into your own words to recapitulate exactly what it is you're praying for.

When we do that with the Lord's Prayer we discover the majority of it concerns spiritual things. God wants our prayers to be kingdom-centered. Beyond anything else, we pray to God that His will be accomplished by His name being glorified and His kingdom being deepened and expanded through the gospel.

But we do pray for things in this world too. And of all the things that are out there in the world, the one God has commanded us to pray for more than any other is people. God invites us to pray for all people, and especially for our family of believers. He tells us to pray for our enemies and those who persecute us, for our political leaders and for all who hold positions of authority, for those who are sick and in need, for those whose work is sharing the message of the gospel for those who are eternally lost and have yet to be brought to faith in Christ.

And yes, even for yourself. When you are weary and burdened, when you are anxious, when you need wisdom in a certain situation, when you are cheerful, when you are sick, when you are tempted and when you have sinned, on every occasion with all kinds of prayers and requests, our Father—our King—tells us to come to Him and for the sake of His Son Jesus, He promises to hear us.

**This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him.**

Who can pray? God's children. How? Because Jesus has given them access to God by living for them as God's faithful and obedient subject and by dying for them to appease the king's righteous wrath over their sins. How are we pray? With humility, confidence, persistence, and whole-heartedness, with our minds set on heavenly things and with great concern for all people, on every occasion, without ceasing, with all kinds of prayers and requests.

And then there's the most important question: How will God answer our prayers? There are only two possibilities, aren't there? He either gives us exactly what is that we've asked for, or He tells us, "I've got something better." Now, "better" is a subjective word, isn't it? What I think is better some of you may not. What God deems to be better or, for that matter best, for us may not always be immediately clear to us. Sometimes you may look back at a prayer God answered differently than you had expected, and with the benefit of hindsight and perspective you'll be able to see how it worked out for good. Other times, though, you may not. And that's why we pray with humility and confidence not only that God will hear us, but that in His infinite wisdom He knows far better than you or I do what it is that is best for us.

And that's what John is saying in those last few lines of our text, not that prayer is like a blank check where no matter what it is we ask for, whether that be a lucrative career and a house in the Hamptons or a miracle cure from some thorn in the flesh, we will have it if we pray to God for it, but rather that whenever we pray to God to grant us something **according to His will** He will answer us according to His will whether we are privy to His exact will in that instance or not.

There's a lot to remember when it comes to prayer. I find it helpful to take the word "pray" and turn it into an acronym. The "P" stands for praise and thanksgiving. The other day I was on the phone with my sister when I heard my four-year-old niece come up to her and say, "Mommy, I love you," and then simply walk away. When we remember why it is that we can come to God in prayer, because He has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus, there's going to be an element of that in our prayer. "Father, Almighty God and King of kings who in mercy has rescued us from the wretchedness of our own sins, we love you! We praise you! We thank you for all the incredible gifts you have given us, chief of which is that forgiveness you bestow on us on behalf of Jesus Your Son."

The “R” is for repentance. Humbly confessing our sins to Him and boldly and confidently trusting in Him for life and salvation. The “A” is for asking anything, spiritual or earthly, great or small, bringing it to our Lord in prayer. And finally, the “Y” is for yielding, submitting to God and trusting that He knows what is best for us, that His will and our eternal good are one and the same.

As useful as that acronym may be, what’s going to be even more helpful in knowing how and what to say to your Father and your King is to never stop listening to what He has to say to you. He teaches us how to pray. He teaches us what to pray for. And He promises that He hears us and will give us exactly what we need. So, we pray, and when we’re done we say...

Amen.