

Troublesome Questions . . . Timeless Answers

Healing for Troubled Hearts – Part III

John 14:3-15; 16:23-28

Introduction

During the average lifetime, I have read, a person will spend five years waiting in line, three years in meetings, nineteen years sleeping, six years eating, seven years in the bathroom, two years calling people who are not home, and five months praying. In fact, if you never missed a Sunday morning worship service in your entire life, you would only be spending five and a half months in church.

Five years waiting in line – five months of waiting on God.

Even though it may be the fault of no one that we have to stand in line for several years, still, is it any wonder why we can have frustrated, hurting, troubled hearts?

You know, as we have studied the book of John, chapters 13 and 14, that the disciples hearts are also frustrated, troubled, and afraid. Jesus has just informed them that a betrayer is among them; that their courageous lion-hearted Simon Peter is going to turn chicken and run away; and that He, their teacher and closest friend, is going to leave them alone.

From this point on, the gospel account is nothing but rapid fire, panic-stricken questions and calm, gentle, thrilling answers.

Thus far, we have studied in this gospel account, Peter asking the question, “Lord, where are you going?”

Jesus answered, “To the Father’s house, and I’m going to add on a wing for you.”

Then Thomas asked the question, “Lord, how do we get there?”

Jesus said, “You don’t need a map, just follow Me – I am the map.”

Now it is Philip’s turn to raise his hand and ask a question that, just like the others, will receive a profound answer.

Let us begin our study today, of John’s gospel, at chapter 14, verse 8. Philip raises his hand and asks his question, or more literally, his request,

Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”

You could summarize his question this way, “Lord, You’ve said You’re going somewhere that we’ve never been and we’ve never seen. Then You tell us we don’t need directions – that we’re to just follow You – but You’ve just said You’re going away. Look, Lord, could you just give us something tangible to hang our faith onto? Just show us a vision of the Father and we’ll all be satisfied. Isn’t that right, fellas?”

And all the other fellows probably chipped in a, “Yea, Lord, that’d be terrific. How ‘bout showing us the Father.”

In a voice that, I believe, was gentle, yet firm; pointed, yet kind, Jesus responds to Philip and the others. Look at verses 9 through 10a.

Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, “Show us the Father”? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?

By the way, there is no passage any stronger in declaring the deity of Jesus Christ than this passage. Jesus says, “Do you want to see the Father? You are looking at Him. Do you want to see God? Look into my face.”

Now notice verses 10b through 11.

The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; otherwise believe on account of the works themselves.

Jesus says, “When you hear Me speak, it is the words of God. When you see the works that I do, they are the works of God.”

More Questions and Answers . . .

Now, what I want to do today, is ask and answer twelve questions.

Question #1 – What tangible things did Christ remind Philip of that could reassure his heart?

1. Questions number one is, what tangible things did Christ remind Philip of that could reassure his heart?

You should circle, in your Bibles, the two things that we just read that Christ pointed to as tangible things that would reassure his, and our, hearts.

The first is in verse 10b,

. . . *the words that I say to you . . .*

and the second is in verse 11b,

. . . *otherwise believe on account of the works themselves.*

These are tangible hooks that you can hang your shield of faith upon! We have the assurance of our future home in heaven and the way to heaven by means of the words and works of Jesus Christ.

John would later write in I John, chapter 5, verse 13,

These things I have written to you . . . in order that you may know that you have eternal life.

“That you may know,” or be assured of – not hope so, think so, or guess so – know so! But many Christians overlook the relationship of that “knowing” with the first part of the verse, “These things I have written to you . . . that you may know . . .”. Our assurance comes from reading the record of Christ’s words and works.

In other words, what Jesus Christ intended to bring reassurance to Philip are the same things that you and I have access to – His words and works.

Question #2 – Will we, as Christ’s disciples, be able to do greater miracles than He did?

2. Question number two is, will we, as Christ’s disciples, be able to do greater miracles than He did?

Notice the first part of verse 12.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and

greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father.

Wow! Can I expect to do what Christ did? Can I cause blind people to see and lame people to walk? Can I walk on top of water and break a small portion of bread and fish into a meal to feed five thousand?

Well, He said so! Now listen to me very carefully. While I believe that God is still performing miracles today, in a myriad of ways, I do not believe that He has made any of us miracle workers.

As the country preacher would say, “This is a ‘nother whole subject.”

We cannot answer this completely in our time today. However, let us answer the dilemma raised when Jesus said, “You will be able to do greater things than I have done.”

Now, that is troubling. Is it possible for the creature to be stronger than the Creator? Can we do greater things than Jesus did?

The answer is, “Yes. He said so in this verse.”

The question then becomes, “What does He mean by the word ‘greater’?”

That is the key. I believe the word “greater” does not refer to more powerful, or more amazing. I believe it refers to two things:

- Our works are greater in kind.

Let me illustrate. The skin of the leper, whom Christ healed, would again be wrinkled with age. But, if you, like Philip Yancey, lead a leper to salvation in Christ, that leper will live in heaven with a new body one day. Lazarus would have to die again. But, when you lead an unbeliever to faith in Christ, even though you cannot bring him back from the dead, he lives forever in heaven. The results last forever.

- Our works are also greater in breadth.

If you study the ministry of Jesus, you will soon discover that His ministry was incredibly small. He traveled approximately one hundred miles from north to south and approximately forty miles from east to west. He never preached outside of Palestine. Europe, China, far away countries and nations had never heard His name. At the end of his ministry, He had a handful of disciples who had believed.

His ministry was so limited that the famous agnostic, David Hume, once said that it was immoral for God to expect the whole world to believe something that was limited to such a small area of the

world, given in such a short span of time, and in only one culture.

Now we know, however, that Christ was a rock, thrown into the pond of human history, and the ripples are reaching to every shore.

Today, are our works greater in breadth? Oh yes. Millions of believers live in China alone. In fact, now the Bible is available in more languages than any other book.

Our church has a member, in Hungary today, working with the missionaries we support. Our church is involved in the ministry, or reaching through our global staff to areas such as:

- Nagano Ken, Japan,
- Indian reservations in Canada,
- radio listeners in Slovakia,
- San Salvador, El Salvador, and
- French servicemen in Toulon, France.

“You will be part of an operation that is far greater, in its kind and breadth, than what I’ve been able to do in three years,” Jesus said.

And He was telling the truth.

And do not overlook the last of this verse – “. . . because I go [back] to the Father.”

You and I will do greater things, not because of great faith, but because of His faithful intercession on our behalf.

And that introduces us to a sweeping promise regarding prayer. Look at John, chapter 14, verse 13 and 14.

And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

That raises another question.

Question #3 – Will Jesus give us anything, if we ask in faith, believing?

3. Question number three is, will Jesus give us anything, if we ask in faith, believing?

Notice chapter 16, verses 23 and 24.

And in that day you will ask Me no question. Truly, truly I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name. Until now you have asked for

nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full.

First, I want you to notice the way Jesus interchanges Himself with the Father, as another subtle, yet obvious, expression of His oneness with the Father and His own deity. Notice again chapter 14, verse 14.

If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

Now look again at chapter 16, verse 23.

. . . if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name.

Now, back to the question, “Will Jesus give us anything we ask for?”

You may have noticed two restrictions, or qualifications:

- The first qualification is that we must pray in Jesus’ name.

We will talk more in a moment about what this means, but for now, Jesus is saying something far deeper than simply encouraging us to end our prayer with the words, “in Jesus’ name, Amen”.

It is indeed, a biblical way to pray. And, it should hold us accountable to the fact that we are going to God by the authority of Jesus Christ, and that what we are praying, ultimately, is something that Jesus would be pleased to lend His name to.

To pray in Jesus’ name is like signing His name to your prayer. This was a new concept to the disciples – not a new formula. Jesus said, “Pray in a way that, when you finish, you can attach My name to it, as if I had said it, knowing that you have prayed something that I could agree wholeheartedly with.”

- The second qualification is that we must pursue God’s glory.

Look back at chapter 14, verse 13.

And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

The main purpose of prayer is not to get us out of trouble or to get us through the pain of life. God is interested in these problems and is deeply interested in conversing with you over every area of life, but His primary purpose goes beyond our immediate needs. Prayer that seeks His glory is of primary importance.

So much of our prayer treats God like a genie. We rub the lamp of prayer and He appears asking, “Yes, Master, what do you wish?”

When our older daughter was learning to color, as a young child, she did the same things that all young children do. They have two problems – choosing the appropriate colors and staying within the lines. As children of the Father, prayer is the same way. We learn to choose what and how to color our requests and we learn to stay within His guidelines.

Prayer in the name of Christ and for the glory of God is the right picture!

Question #4 – How do we know if we are praying in Jesus’ name?

4. Question number four is, how do we know if we are praying in Jesus’ name or not?!

In verse 13, Jesus reveals a completely new truth to the disciples. Remember, in Matthew, chapter 6, Jesus had taught the disciples to pray to the “Father” in heaven. Now, in this verse, He reveals that their prayers will be answered when asked in His name, or “onoma” in the Greek.

So the question to ask is, “How do we know if we are really praying in Jesus’ name?!”

The next eight of the twelve questions will address the answer to this question.

Question #5 – Are we even qualified to pray?

5. Questions number five is, are we even qualified to pray?

Unbelievers are not qualified to pray. Turn back to John, chapter 9, verse 31.

We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing, and does his will, He hears him.

David wrote in Psalm, chapter 34, verses 15 and 17a,

The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry. . . . The righteous cry and the Lord hears . . .

I believe the first prayer that God “hears” is the prayer for salvation. Until then, you are simply speaking to air. God is wanting to hear your prayer of repentance. If you have not claimed the name “Christian” in life, you cannot claim the name of Christ in prayer.

You might ask, “Is that fair?”

Well, the Bible also says that, not only are unbelievers disqualified from praying an effectual prayer, but disobedient believers are not qualified either.

David wrote, in Psalm, chapter 66, verse 18,

If I regard . . .

(meaning to cherish and defend)

. . . wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear

Chuck Swindoll told a funny story of something that happened to him when he visited the hospital one evening. He was coming down a long hall to visit a woman and saw her husband standing in the hallway smoking. When the man caught sight of Swindoll walking toward him, he, evidently, did not want his pastor to see him smoking. So, he stuck his hand, with the lit cigarette, into his front pants pocket. Swindoll decided to carry on a conversation with him.

The man turned red, fidgeted, and smoke began coming out of his pocket. Finally, Chuck laughed and said, “Listen, why don’t you go ahead and finish it?”

The man said, “Finish what?”

Then he hurried off in a cloud of smoke.

Do not be so foolish as to go before a Holy God and try to carry on a conversation with Him, while at the same time, trying to hide some smoldering disobedience.

Question #6 – Are we praying with pure motives?

6. Question number six is, are we praying with pure motives?

The test of a prayer is whether Jesus would pray your prayer. Praying in Jesus’ name is praying a prayer and then, asking Jesus to sign His name to it. So, would He pray it?!

The Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh was criticized for his fleet of expensive cars. He was quoted, in the *New Yorker*, as saying, “If you Americans came face to face with your God, you’d ask Him for a Chevrolet.”

James exhorted the church for their mistaken use of prayer and pointed out that this was the reason they were not getting any answers. Look at James, chapter 4, verse 3.

You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

The word translated “pleasures,” is the Greek word that gives us the English word “hedonism,” or seeking pleasures.

Question #7 – Are we demanding God’s timetable match our own?

7. Question number seven is, are we demanding God’s timetable match our own?

And why are we in a hurry? Is it because our answered prayer will make life easier?

So, the majority of our praying focuses primarily on a comfortable life, “Lord, protect me from anything that would make life difficult – and hurry!”

Is that the prayer Jesus would pray? It is interesting that Jesus prayed in the garden and was so intense in his praying that small corpuscles burst beneath his skin and blood oozed from his pores along with sweat. Prayer, for Him, was the means He used to gather His strength to go through with His assignment; prayer was not the means of delivering Him from it.

In other words, prayer is not always a substitute for pain, sometimes it prepares us for it!

Question #8 – Are we more concerned with our requests to God than our relationship with God?

8. Question number eight is, are we more concerned with our requests to God than our relationship with God?

George MacDonald said this,

What if God knows prayer to be the thing we need first and most? What if the main object in God’s idea of prayer is a supplying of our great, our endless need – the need of Himself. Hunger may drive the runaway child home, and he may or may not be fed at once, but he needs his parents more than his dinner. Communion with God is the one need of the soul beyond every other need.

Question #9 – Are we requesting that God respond in the way we are expecting?

9. Question number nine is, are we requesting that God respond in the way we are expecting?

In other words, do you believe you already know what is best and that prayer is just a way to get God’s stamp of approval?

Vernon Janzen told the story of sitting in a worship service one Sunday morning. A young child was acting up during the morning worship hour. The parents did their best to maintain some sense of order. Finally, the father picked the little fellow up and walked sternly down the aisle on his way out. This kid was in trouble. Just as they reached the doorway to the foyer, the little boy called out loudly to the congregation, “Pray for me! Pray for me!”

That is one spiritual kid! Not really. In fact, he expected his prayers to be answered only one way. How about us?

Question #10 – Are we more interested in what God will give us than what God will do in us?

10. Question number ten is, are we more interested in what God will give us than what God will do in us?

Philips Brooks, a great preacher from a century ago, said,

Don’t pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger people. Don’t pray for tasks equal to your power; pray for power equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle, but you shall become a miracle.

Jesus never taught his disciples how to preach, He taught them how to pray.

Say that prayer with me.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Stop. He says, “. . . Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done . . .”.

You and I are to pray, not to have *our* will done in heaven, but *God’s* will done on earth. Prayer, then is aligning our will to God’s will, not His will to ours!

I often think of being in a rowboat. I have no oars, but I do have an anchor attached to a rope. With all my might, I throw the anchor to shore and begin to pull. Finally, I am safe. Now, did I pull the shore to myself, or did I pull myself to shore?

Praying in Jesus' name is like pulling my will over to the sovereign will of God.

Question #11 – Are we really expecting God to be listening, Christ to be interceding, and an answer to be forthcoming?

11. Question number eleven is, are we really expecting God to be listening, Christ to be interceding, and an answer to be forthcoming?

When you pray, do you really expect God to follow through? Do you ask, "Lord, give me eyes to see your will accomplished"?

I think we are a lot like the father and son in the autobiography of Helen Hayes. The actress told a story about Thanksgiving day. She was cooking her first turkey dinner for her family. Before serving it, she announced to her husband, Charles, and their son, James, "Now I know this is the first turkey I've ever cooked. If it isn't any good, I don't want anybody to say a word. We'll just get up from the table, without comment, and go out to a restaurant to eat."

Then, she went back into the kitchen. When she entered the dining room, bearing the turkey on a platter, she found her husband and son seated at the table – with their hats and coats on.

They were not expecting much!

That is the way we go to God – with our hats and coats on. It is as if to say, "Good Christians pray, but I'm not really expecting much from our time together."

When that is so, we are not then praying in Jesus' name and for the glory of God to be revealed.

I happen to believe that the faith of a child is a powerful lesson to us older disciples. The prayers of children convict us. They pray assuming God is listening.

Recently, we dedicated seventeen moms and dads to the Lord, along with their little children. One family adopted a boy and they told how that little boy was an answer to their own daughter's prayers.

It reminded me of the little five year old boy who told his dad and mom repeatedly, that he would like to have a baby brother. Now he did not know it, at the time, but Mom was two months pregnant. So, Dad decided to shore up his son's faith in the fact that prayer accomplishes much. He pulled his son aside and said, "Listen, son, if you'll pray for about seven

months (and he explained how long that was), I'm convinced that God will answer your prayers."

That night, this young boy went to his bedroom early to start praying for a baby brother. Seven months later, his mother returned home from the hospital. She and Dad called their son into the living room. His dad pulled back the blanket and there were, not just one baby brother, but two baby brothers – twins! Dad put his hand on his son's shoulder and said, "Now, aren't you glad you prayed?"

The young boy hesitated for a moment, and then said, "Yes, and aren't you glad I quit when I did?"

Do we pray assuming God is listening?!

Question #12 – Are we willing to become the answer to our own prayer?

12. Question number twelve is, are we willing to become the answer to our own prayer?

You might pray:

- "Lord provide for the needy . . ." – maybe He wants you to buy a bag of groceries.
- "Lord encourage the saints . . ." – maybe He wants you to write a letter.
- "Lord, help the foreign missionaries . . ." – maybe He wants you to be one.

The greatest thrill in praying is not receiving an answer, but becoming an answer.

Conclusion

Well, Jesus intended to bring healing to the disciples' troubled hearts – so He told them, and us, about our future home in heaven. Then He told them, and us, about our present privilege in praying – how to do it, what it means.

As life goes on, we will undoubtedly suffer many of the things that bring trouble and pain. We will get sick. Friends will get sick and pass away. Many disappointments will come to our homes, our work, and other areas. How will you and I react in these circumstances? Will we complain and blame God? Or will we keep praying, in Jesus' name and for His glory? If we choose the latter, Jesus said that our joy will be full.

I want to tie this all together with one final thought.

A ray of light travels at 186,000 miles a second. So a beam of light from Earth will reach the moon in a

second and a half; Mercury in four and a half minutes; Jupiter in thirty five minutes; Saturn in about an hour.

But, if you traveled just to the edge of our galaxy, the Milky Way, it would take you about one hundred thousand years. And, if you had counted the stars along the way, you would have counted more than one hundred billion.

The God who created all of this, with the power of His Word, invites you to come close and talk to Him – to tell Him your heart, your problems, your dreams. And, when you come to Him in Jesus' name, desiring to be like Jesus and live a life that pleases Him, you will never leave His presence empty handed.

Hudson Taylor said,

I used to ask God to help me. Then, I asked Him if I might help Him. Finally, I ended up asking Him to do His work in me and through me.

That is praying in Jesus' name. And that will bring healing to your troubled heart.