

The Final Words: Prayer & Proclamation!

Does anyone have a testimony of a recently answered prayer?

I was sharing in Craft group, Tuesday last week, how God had answered Rachel and my prayers by providing **work for my father**. Only God didn't answer it in our timing. My father was out of work for almost a year. We couldn't understand why, but it turned out God had it all under control.

Dad being out of work allowed my mother to work full-time as well as study part-time without having to think about the regular household duties she would normally take care of. Now that she has finished her study,

DAD FOUND A JOB!

Thank the Lord!

How do you feel about prayer?

Are you **absolutely convinced** that God works through our prayers?

Have you had experiences of what appear to be **unanswered prayer**?

One preacher's 5 year-old daughter noticed that her father always paused and bowed his head for a moment before starting his sermon. One day she asked him why.

"Well, Honey," he began, proud that his daughter was so observant of his messages, "I'm asking the Lord to help me preach a good sermon."

"How come He doesn't do it?" she asked.

Unanswered prayer?

Perhaps it's a matter of **incorrect theology**?

One young girl prayed:

"Dear God, is it true that my father won't go to heaven if he uses his 'golf words' in the house?"

Perhaps it's a matter of **timing**?

“Dear Lord,
So far everything has gone well today.
I have been **patient**. I have been **thoughtful of others**. I have **put others first**. I have not **gossiped**, been **greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish**, or self-**indulgent**. I have not **lost my temper**. I have not **whined, cursed**, or **eaten any chocolate**.

However, Lord, in just a few minutes I'll be getting out of bed and I am going to need all the help I can get!”

In this final sermon in our series, we are going to see what John has to say about prayer. We're also going to see what else he has to say in the closing address of his epistle;

HIS FINAL WORDS!

But before we read this week's text, let's briefly **revisit** some of the ideas from previous sermons leading up to today.

- We began by learning about the context of this epistle. That it was written by John, Son of Zebedee, to a community of believers who were currently going through some difficulty. There had been some false teachers denying Jesus' deity, who had left the community. But now those who were left were both hurt and confused.
- Some of the points from previous sermons, talked about:
 - a need for us to **fellowship** with both God and each other;
 - a need to **love one another**;
 - a warning **not to fall in love** with the things of **this world**;
 - a warning about **false teaching** and how to know **God's truth**;
 - our status as **God's children**;
 - as those who can **overcome the world** through their faith in Jesus;
 - and last week the **assurance** we have of our **life in Jesus**.

So to try and sum up all of these messages, we could say that John essentially did three things:

- 1. He wanted to encourage the community in their nature as God's children bearing His image.**

This is why he almost dualistically compares those ‘walking in the light’; those who are ‘God’s children’, with those ‘out in the world’.

He wanted to give them an **assurance** of their nature as Christians.

2. Then he shows them the implications of this nature.

This is why there is a strong theme of **LOVE** in this epistle, because:
GOD IS LOVE!

Because God is love, we are to love him, and love one another.

We are also to ‘Walk in the light, as he is in the light.’

We are to live righteous lives as Jesus is righteous.

3. Finally he gives them some tools with which to continue on in their nature as Christians.

How to ‘test the spirits’ of this world. How to be discerning. How to combat the false teachings of those who are ‘anti-Christ’.

So after all of this John would likely have been hoping that his listeners will come away:

- **Assured in their faith,**
- **Developing in the attributes of their Saviour, and;**
- **Ready to combat anything that the world will throw at them.**

Is this your perception of our series through *1 John*?

How have you found it?

Has anyone been here for each and every one of the messages?

It’s been quite a journey, but it’s good to look back and see the big picture. To remember what the Holy Spirit has revealed to us through this book.

Now, however, we finish with the remaining 9 verses of the *5th Chapter*.

JOHN’S FINAL WORDS.

He does not close this 'Greco-Roman' letter in the typical fashion of the time, which was normally some sort of final greeting and benediction.

Not only was he a non-conformist in the opening, but he closed in a similar style.

There was no:

"Sincerely,
Love from John."

However, his **final words** are of great significance, because he knew they would be the last words his listeners would hear.

I say '**hear**' because typically these letters were read out loud in the community centres.

So let's **hear** John's final words together. Reading from *1 John 5:13-21*.

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. 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.

If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true – even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

PRAY

Well, let's not dawdle about; let's get straight into it.

There is a natural delineation in the text here:

Verses 13 – 17 are about PRAYER.

Verses 18 – 21 are a PROCLAMATION;

A proclamation of some **closing truths** John wishes to leave his listeners with.

Let's begin with John's discussion on **PRAYER**.

First of all in *verse 13* he states one of his intentions for writing this letter: ***that you may know that you have eternal life.***

It is common for John to bridge the themes of his letter, and since last week we were looking at the previous text which was about **Life In Jesus**, he states this intention before beginning a discussion on **prayer**.

Then he goes on to give us an **assurance in prayer** that has many parallels to other scripture in the New Testament. *Verse 14: **This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.***

In this case to **hear us**, is to **hear favourably!**

And *verse 15* paraphrased: ***If he hears us favourably, he gives us what we asked of him.***

But there was a qualification for his **hearing favourably**.

WE MUST ASK ACCORDING TO HIS WILL.

This is mirrored in *John 15:7: **If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.***

This is a tremendous promise!!!

God will give us what we ask for in prayer!

But it must be asked ACCORDING TO HIS WILL!

So what does that mean?

How are we to **pray according to God's will?**

How do we **know God's will?**

I want to suggest we pray according to God's will by praying what I call:

LISTENING PRAYER!

What is 'listening prayer'?

It's a discipline of learning to **hear God's Spirit**, and **feel God's heart**, while we pray.

As Jesus said in *John 15:7*, we are to **remain in him**, and **his words are to remain in us**.

This is what it is to PRAY IN THE NAME OF JESUS!

The more we grow to understand God's heart, the more we learn of his word from the Bible, and the more we learn to become sensitive to His Spirit's leading in our lives, the better we become at **discerning God's will** in order to **pray according to God's will**.

Perhaps a crude illustration from within a marriage might help here.

I realise I am hardly as qualified as many of you on this subject given Rachel and I have only been married a year and a half, but this helps to illustrate my point.

If I were to ask Rachel for a back massage, to ease the pain in my lower back, as soon as she walked in the door after a long and tiring day's work, I can fairly well discern her answer.

No!

I would need to give her a big hug first, say “hello darling, how has your day been?”; then allow her to expend her daily word count by sharing all of her feelings with me. Then, when I sense the right tone, when we are both feeling more intimate, and when she is in a better place to respond to my need, I might sensitively ask her for the massage.

I realise there are glaring holes in this illustration, however, the point is this:

The more I understand my wife, the more time I spend with her, the better I know her and the more able I am to determine her will or response to me. IT IS THE SAME WITH GOD!

This is why we must learn to **listen** as we **pray**.

Let’s become PRAYERS who LISTEN as well as SPEAK!

Because when we are listening prayers, we can be CONFIDENT PRAYERS!

This is why John was writing this. He wanted to **assure** the community that they could have confidence in their prayers. That they should **pray for each other** and that these sorts of prayers can **restore life!**

*1 John 5 verse 16: **If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life.***

He then goes on to talk about sin that does lead to death, and sin that doesn’t.

The general understanding here is that John is referring to an Old Testament understanding of sin that was still prevalent in Jewish practice when John wrote this letter. Taken from Leviticus there were two types of sin:

- Inadvertent sins that could be forgiven by sacrificial temple rituals, and;
- Intentional sins that were punishable either by exile or death!

Regardless of this difference, John's emphasis is on the **confidence** that we can have **in prayer!**

That as we learn to pray in God's will, we can be **CONFIDENT** that God will **hear** our prayers and grant them accordingly!

That in a very real sense, **God uses our prayers to fulfil his purposes here on this earth!**

Our prayers MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Our prayers CAN BRING LIFE!

Our prayers CAN BRING CHANGE!

Our prayers CAN BRING TRANSFORMATION!

Not only that, but we are TRANSFORMED as we PRAY!

WHAT INCENTIVE TO PRAY!

Church, our culture would try and tell us that prayer is useless and ineffectual. That it makes no difference to anything. But here, God's words stand in direct opposition to our culture's words.

God tells us that our prayers **make a difference** in this world.

Whose words are you going to believe this morning?

Let's be CONFIDENT, LISTENING PRAYERS!

This was John's first point in his final words. To his Johannine community in a difficult place, he tells them:

To be CONFIDENT, LISTENING PRAYERS!

That was *verses 13 – 17. (1 John 5.)*

Let's finally look at *verses 18 – 21* in John's final words:

A PROCLAMATION!

A PROCLAMATION of the truth John wishes to leave his listeners with.

I call them '**the three knows**'.

Why do I call them that?

Because if you read carefully, you may have picked up on the fact that he repeats the phrase '**we know**' on three occasions in verses 18 – 21.

What are the three things **we know**?

1. **That we are KEPT BY CHRIST;**
2. **That we are MARKED FOR CHRIST; and**
3. **That we are ETERNAL IN CHRIST.**

Verse 18 is the first '**we know**', it says: ***We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.***

We know that if we are followers of Jesus; if we have faith in Jesus the Son of God and are therefore deemed God's children, then **sin has no hold on us.**

We are deemed righteous, and the **devil cannot harm us.**

Why?

Because ***the one who was born of God keeps us safe!***

JESUS KEEPS US SAFE!

Jesus PROTECTS us!

We are KEPT in HIM!

We are KEPT BY CHRIST!

Romans 8:31b: If God is for us, who can be against us?

How reassuring is it to know that **Jesus has got your back covered?**

That he is watching over you and shepherding you?

I personally take HUGE comfort in these words!

We are KEPT BY CHRIST.

We are also MARKED FOR CHRIST.

The second '*we know*' is *verse 19: **We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.***

We are **set apart** as followers of Jesus!

We are **different!**

Let's make no qualms about it. The Bible doesn't!

We are **Light** living in a **dark world**, because we have the **true light** living within us!

We are not part of this world. We are citizens of another; an eternal kingdom!

And this is not an **exclusive citizenship**.

All are invited to join in the wedding feast!

But we must not forget that we are not yet home. We are still living in our **enemies' territory**.

Not only is this cause to be cautious and on guard to the enemies' plans, but - knowing that we are **kept by Christ** – we can take hope and encouragement that we are set apart by a **Holy,**

**Gracious,
Compassionate, and
Loving
GOD!**

We are **MARKED FOR CHRIST!**

That was the second '*we know*'.

The third is in *verse 20*: ***We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true – even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.***

Jesus has given us understanding so that we may **know him!**

And what is in store for those who **know** Jesus?

those who have **given over their lives** to this Saviour?

ETERNAL LIFE!

They are **ETERNAL IN CHRIST!**

We are **ETERNAL IN CHRIST!**

We explored this last week, and what a wonderful and exciting truth this is!

That we may **continue to live!**

But **not** continue in the same way we live now.

Not in **pain, difficulty, hardship and struggle.**

But instead in **exceeding joy,**
eternal comfort, and
excelling peace!

This was John's final proclamation.

His FINAL WORDS:

That we are **Kept by Christ,**
 That we are **Marked for Christ,** and
 That we are **Eternal in Christ.**

Then his final sentence in *verse 21* is this:

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

People have questioned why John finished with what seemed like a change in topic to an idea that he hadn't even really raised in this epistle.

They wondered if there was more that came after this that we have somehow lost through the hourglass of history.

However **I feel differently!**

I believe this final sentence ties in well with the previous paragraph.

In the previous paragraph, John was pointing his community to **JESUS!**

He was showing them, that regardless of the difficulty they had experienced:

They could have HOPE IN JESUS!

That though people in the church may let them down,
though the church itself can let them down,

JESUS WILL NOT!

Jesus is bigger than the church and its problems.

And this is why they must keep themselves from anything that could take the place of JESUS;

ANY IDOL!

Church, I feel John's final words are for us today.

His emphasis on **PRAYER**, and his **PROCLAMATION** of **Jesus**,

We must TAKE TO HEART!

Let's continue to be a **CONFIDENT**, **praying church** that **listens as well as speaks**,

And let's continue to keep **Jesus in the centre of all we do** knowing we are:

KEPT BY CHRIST,

MARKED FOR CHRIST, and

ETERNAL IN CHRIST!

What a wonderful God we serve!