

## **What Did Jesus Mean? - Part 6.**

### **Asking for anything in His Name.**

In this final talk in this present series on problem passages in the Gospels I am turning to John's Gospel, Chapter 14, the verses 13 and 14, where we read, "And whatsoever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." In fact the Lord reiterated this several times, and on that same occasion, for in chapters 15 and 16 of the same Gospel, all part of the one discourse, we read, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." (Chapter 15, 7). And in Chapter 16, "Truly, truly, I say unto you, whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you."

I speak of these words as constituting one of the problem passages in the Gospels for what are obvious reasons. Countless things are asked of God, in prayer, in the name of Jesus and are not received. The prayers of Christians throughout the world are invariably phrased to cover this aspect of things. And yet it has been realised, probably right from the beginning, that it has been no guarantee of response after all. "If you shall ask anything in my name" the Lord said, "I will do it." And, as we've noted, taking His words literally, many have done so, and continue to do so, only to be disappointed with the results.

This being so, two things suggest themselves. Either the Lord didn't mean what He said or we are not understanding Him as He meant us to. As for the suggestion that He didn't mean what He said, we cannot, however, accept this. Difficulties though there are in the Gospels we have found over these past weeks that the problem arises through an inadequate understanding of what is meant or because the words of the Lord are taken altogether too literally.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the case of those words which we considered in the first talk of this series. The words of our Lord in Luke's Gospel, Chapter 14. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. . . whosoever of you that forsakes not all that he has, he cannot be my disciple." (verses 26 and 33). The problem lies not with what the Lord said as such, but with our wrongly understanding it. Rightly understood, He says something here which is of great importance to us and which has a very practical bearing on our lives.

So we turn again to these words from John's Gospel questioning not whether the Lord said them, for we have no reason to doubt that He did, but questioning the usual

understanding of them, which is where the problem arises. "If you ask anything in my name, I will do it."

I would like us to pause a moment here and to think about what is meant by the Lord's name first of all.

When we think about it we realise that even in everyday life and conversation names of people bring to mind and suggest to us certain qualities, qualities which we like or dislike. Parents choosing a name for their baby favour one and reject another because of the qualities they suggest. There are some names we get to like very much because of the qualities of the person who bears them. Mention a certain name and it will bring to mind not only that person but the qualities we have admired in them.

I say all this by way of introducing the teaching that names in the Bible signify qualities.

"In heaven" wrote Swedenborg "no attention is paid to any one's name, but when any one is named, or when the word name is spoken, there is presented the idea of the person's quality, that is, of all things that are his, that are connected with him and that are in him; hence in the Word 'name' signifies quality." (*Arcana Caelestia* 2009).

Where there is a change of name, as with the names Abram and Sarai, a change of quality is signified.

Bearing in mind then that names in the Word signify qualities, the name of the Lord means all those Divine qualities we know are in Him and which proceed from Him - His Love and Wisdom, His goodness and truth. Everything that speaks to us of the Lord; everything which reveals Him to us; everything which brings home His qualities to us; these are what is meant by His name.

"If you ask anything in my name" the Lord said, I will do it." And we are in a position to understand now what He meant when He said it.

To ask in the Lord's name means to ask in accordance with His Love and Wisdom. It means to request those things which accord with what He already desires for us and which follow through His love and mercy for us. It is to ask for compassion and understanding, for example, knowing that He wills to extend these things to us. It is to ask for forgiveness which, again, we know He wants to bestow upon us. It is to ask for deliverance from our evils knowing that this is what He always desires. It is to ask for spiritual and heavenly things; for progress in regeneration, in becoming more heavenlike. And these are things that can all be granted. Prayers of this kind will, if offered sincerely, never meet with disappointment. "If you ask anything in my name, I will do it." Everything, as we saw a moment ago, which speaks to us of the Lord;

which reveals Him to us; is what is meant by His name. Everything which establishes His reputation amongst us. This includes the Word Itself. It includes all the things we learn of the Lord in the Word. It embraces, we are told, "everything of love and faith from which the Lord is worshipped." (*Arcana Caelestia* 2724). And this being so we begin to see something of what is involved in the second Commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain" and in the words which form part of the Lord's Prayer, "Hallowed be Thy name". Far more is meant, as we can now see, than just the names by which the Lord is referred. To hallow the Lord's name means, for example, to hallow all things of His Love and Wisdom in our lives. It also means to reverence the Divine Word; to refuse to make light of it or to listen to frivolity about it. We hallow the Lord's name by listening to, and resolving to live by, His Divine truth.

It has been foolishness on man's part to think that the way in which he phrases his prayers determines whether they are heard or not. Behind it all has lain the false supposition that a relationship with Christ, which we can invoke in times of prayer, will win us special favour in the sight of God. We reject the notion and know that this is not meant here. The risen Lord Jesus Christ is the one God of heaven and earth to whom all our prayers should be directed. He wills to bring to our lives every spiritual blessing. His unceasing endeavour is to lead us to the heavenly way of life. These are His purposes for us. And every prayer which, as we noted, conveys a real intention to co-operate with those purposes, will be answered.

So often when we pray we are thinking of what we want and feel we ought to have. We ask for favours which, in fact, and if we knew, would only be our undoing. Such prayers are offered not in the Lord's name but in our name; offered, in other words, according to what we desire and how we feel things ought to be. And invariably we are disappointed with the results. Prayer, I stress, must be offered in the Lord's name; according to what He wills for us and as He knows in His wisdom is best for us. "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you" we read "you shall ask what you will and it shall be done unto you". (John 15,7). And here is embodied the point which is involved. Insofar as we are in tune with the Lord; know what he wills for us, and offer our prayers in accordance with that; it shall be done unto us.

It was once said, "As we come into union with the Lord, and are imbued with His spirit, and trust Him with implicit confidence, we shall have no desire for anything contrary to His will. The quality of our prayers will change. We shall only ask directly and positively for spiritual good; for help to overcome our evils; for light in our darkness, and for the love of heaven in our hearts. If we pray for particular, natural

blessings or to be saved from the difficulties and dangers and trials of this life, it will always be with the reservation, "Nevertheless not my will, but Thine be done." So far as we cherish this spirit, and pray in this manner, our request will be answered." (*Perfect Prayer* pages 19 and 20, Rev. Chauncey Giles).

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