

Sermon 48, My God Will Hear Me, 1 John 5:14-15

Proposition: When you pray, you can be confident that you come into God's presence and speak with Him.

- I. Confidence Before God
 - II. Speaking Directly to God
 - III. Having What We Requested From God
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- I. Prayer as a formal Audience with God: He Hears Us, vv. 14b-15a
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 - A. We Have Confidence, v. 14a
 - B. We Have What We Requested, v. 15b

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, our text this morning is the beginning of the end of First John. After all that he has said about knowing that you know Christ, he wants to end by reminding us of a few key points. This is the pocket manual of the Christian life. If you were to take any portion of the New Testament and laminate it on a card with the title "quick start guide to the Christian life," it would be these final 8 verses of 1 John. Yes, most of us would rather have the Beatitudes tell us how blessed we are. Most of us would rather laminate Psalm 23 about goodness and mercy all the days of our life. But in actual fact, these words here at the end of 1 John cover the subjects that the apostle John thought were most important to leave the people of God with. Some scholars actually believe that these are the final words of the New Testament, written years after the completion of all the other books. Even if they aren't, we know that they are some of the last words of the last surviving apostle. This is pure gold — basic directions for the Christian life. What do you do when you have eternal life? How do you live in such a situation? Well, John begins with prayer. We know that He hears us, and we know that we have our requests. What I want to show you this morning, with God's help, is that we can have confidence that God hears us, and that ultimately that is what we want.

I. Prayer as a formal Audience with God: He Hears Us, vv. 14b-15a

John starts by explaining the first thing we need to know about possessing eternal life. If you have the Son of God, you share the life of God. That has been the burden of John's message, stated in different ways over and over throughout this letter. When you live with God's life and love with God's love, then you can be absolutely certain that God hears you.

Now, I want to make the case to you this morning that what John is saying here should revolutionize our concept of prayer. In general, we think of prayer as asking God to do something. God, would you please help/change/be with/ bless situation x, person y, or institution

z? That is the typical form of prayer in which we indulge. But brothers and sisters, is that the form of prayer that John seems to envision here? In one sense, obviously it is. John talks about making requests. We are asking God for something. But then John also talks about getting requests. And he says that to know God hears us is tantamount to having what we asked. Now, there are two things this statement could mean. Let's look at it a bit more closely:

God hears us.

We have what we asked for (not we *will* have it, but we have it)

John seems to suggest, by putting these truths in parallel with one another, that being heard by God and having what we asked for are two ways of stating the same truth. Now, that truth could be either of two things.

1. God says "yes" to every request. Like a genie in a bottle, the Almighty commits Himself to granting every wish we throw His way (so long as certain conditions, namely "His will," are met).
2. What we're really asking for in every request is His attention. We want to bend His ear. We want to know that we were heard.

Well, brothers and sisters, how about it? Which of these statements more accurately captures your prayer life and the prayer life of the Biblical saints? I think the answer is overwhelmingly clear. We see some prayers answered with yes, some with no, some with maybe, throughout the Bible. God told Paul "No" about the thorn in the flesh. He told Jesus "No" about letting the cup pass. He told Moses "Yes" about coming with the people from Sinai to the Promised Land. He told Elijah "Yes" about the fire from Heaven, but "No" when Elijah prayed for death in the next chapter. And when the church of every age has prayed "Thy Kingdom come," He has said "Wait."

Anyway, is this a God who says "Yes" to every request? Of course not. Now, we know that He says yes to every prayer that's in accordance with His will. But if we think of prayer *only* as a means of getting stuff from God, then we will think "There is no need to pray. Of course He is going to do His will. Of course He is going to do what He thinks He ought to do." Brothers and sisters, just a second there. Prayer is at least partially a means of getting stuff from God. But it is more than that. Prayer is not primarily about getting stuff; it's primarily about getting attention. Put more positively, it's primarily about being with God. That is what John says in the text before us. When we pray, we know we were heard. And that was our main request. "God, would you listen to me!" We know that personal communion with *anyone*, superior, inferior, or equal, does not mean that they will do every last thing we think they should. Shoot, *I* don't do every last thing I think I should, and frankly, I don't expect you to do everything I think you should do either. I don't expect my children to receive my lightest word as the voice of God; I don't expect my wife to hop to it and follow my slightest whim; nor do I expect to follow the lightest whim of my boss or do absolutely everything she ever thinks about suggesting. You don't either. Why not? Because that's not what relationships are about! Yes, there is a place for

obeying superiors and honoring equals and inferiors. But any relationship that's about what you get out of it, or about what they get out of it, is a doomed relationship.

Why do I call my parents every Sunday evening and talk to them for 2.5 hours? It's not because I have two and a half hours worth of things to ask for. I don't give them a giant Christmas list every week. I just want to be heard, and they want to be heard. We want to maintain our relationship, and so we talk to each other. Do I want them to do particular things? Of course! "Get the guest room ready; please take me to the airport; tell me what you know about buying car insurance." But brothers and sisters, why do I talk to my parents? Because I want to be with them! Just by talking to them, I have what I asked for — which, at the end of the day, is their loving attention and care.

Brothers and sisters, God answers specific prayer requests. I have seen people healed. I have seen financial provision. My own roommate (now brother-in-law) received an anonymous envelope full of cash to pay for one of his semesters at PHC after praying for provision. I have seen bureaucratic hurdles overcome, as happened the time I forged the dean's signature on a form to allow me to drop a class and register for a different one. (I legitimately had his signature; I just had to redo the form and wasn't able to get the real signature again). I have seen safe pregnancies and births, lost keys found, churches rebuilt, forgiveness granted after some pretty nasty sins, hardened sinners turned to Christ — I've seen all of that in answer to prayer. I have seen God's provision for this very church. Remember how last year giving was down \$5400, and God trimmed exactly \$5400 off our budget for this year? Brothers and sisters, yes, we have "Yes" answers to specific requests, as many of the Biblical heroes did. But far more important than that, we have an audience with the Almighty. We can come into His presence anytime. We can no more guarantee that He will give us whatever we want than we can guarantee that anyone else will give us whatever we want. But we can know something we can only know about our closed friends and loved ones: He will hear us. What more can you ask than to be heard? Especially by the God who literally knows better on every single one of your requests? He doesn't promise that He will forget everything He knows and give you a bunch of stuff that would be bad for you. But He does promise to hear you out. If you know that He hears you, then you know that you have your requests — not your particular requests, as in a brand-new Dell XPS 15 with 32 gigs of RAM and a 1 TB solid-state drive and an Intel Core i9 (tenth generation) — but rather, the request behind all requests, the cry of the heart for attention, for love, for genuine relationship. That is the request that God always hears. That is the answer you have whenever you pray. That is the result of sharing eternal life with the Father and His Son. When you have that life, you have a God who hears you when you speak to Him.

II. Prayer's Outcome, vv. 14-15

So brothers and sisters, please, get a paradigm shift on prayer. Yes, it is important to ask God for things. But it is more important to know that He is listening and to talk to Him about everything, whether it's a request or not. In fact, many requests that we ask God for are actually things that we ought to be doing ourselves. Yes, we need His help. But if you only ask God to keep you

from sin, but do nothing to actually stay away from sin, then you are not really praying with sincerity.

Well, when you learn to pray like someone who really shares God's eternal life, what is the outcome?

A. We Have Confidence, v. 14a

The first outcome is confidence. You can talk to the most highly placed individual in the universe at any time. Forget for a moment the character of the man who occupies the Oval Office at the moment. Whatever you think of him, don't think about him. Just think about the presidency. How would you feel knowing that the president would take your call no matter where he was or what he was doing? Of course you would know that the president doesn't always get to do what he wants, never mind always getting to do what you want. But nonetheless, you have his ear. What more could you ask for?

The name for this feeling is "confidence." When you know that you will be heard, we call that confidence. Do you have this feeling about talking to God? If you do, then you will be eager to pray. None of us has the slightest desire to talk to the empty air. It's always a bad feeling when you're talking to someone and then look around and realize that you've been speaking to nobody for thirty second, two minutes, or even longer. Well, this feeling of confidence is the opposite of that.

Notice, too, where the confidence is. The confidence is in His presence. Outside of His presence, you may lack this confidence. You may not really feel like praying until you've been doing it for some time. That's OK, in one sense, because the text tells us that we have confidence *when we're in the presence of God*. When we're not there, that confidence can shrivel up. When I stand in front of an English class, I have confidence in their presence. I know that I can teach English. But when I stand in front of a calculus class, my confidence evaporates. I know that I don't know calc and can't teach it to save my life.

Does God strike fear into your heart? Do you stand before Him and know that you have absolutely no reason to expect Him to listen to you or do anything you asked? If you live in the love that we've seen 1 John talking about for almost 50 sermons now, then you have confidence, not painful fear, in God's presence. You have a calm certainty that He wants to hear you, that He will give you what you've asked for, and that in His sight you have nothing to fear.

B. We Have What We Requested, v. 15b

But not only do we have certainty that He will hear us; again, we know that we have His ear, and that that is the request behind and beyond all requests. "Father, hear me!" And He does. Do you know that? Do you have confidence in that?

Prayer is the first act of a Christian. If you have eternal life, you will start crying out to the Father from whom you have it. That's how they knew Saul of Tarsus was a Christian. He started praying. Could someone track your prayer life and know that you're a Christian? If not, then you need to learn that God loved you first. And when you learn to feel His love, then you

will learn confidence in His presence. He hears you. So keep talking. Amen.