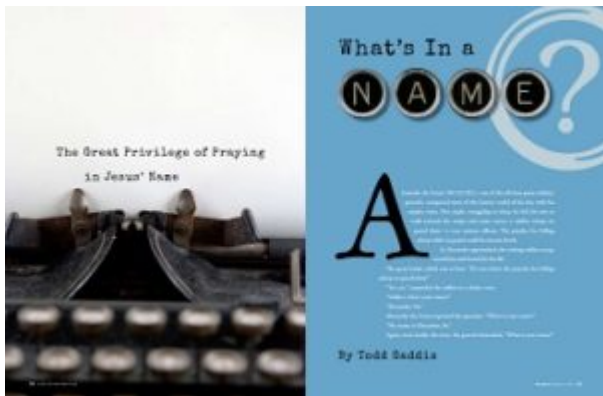


What's In a Name?

The Great Privilege of Praying in Jesus' Name

By Todd Gaddis



Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.), one of the all-time great military generals, conquered most of the known world of his day with his mighty army. One night, struggling to sleep, he left his tent to walk around the camp and came across a soldier asleep on guard duty—a very serious offense. The penalty for falling asleep while on guard could be instant death.

As Alexander approached, the waking soldier recognized him and feared for his life. The great leader called out to him, “Do you know the penalty for falling asleep on guard duty?”

“Yes, sir,” responded the soldier in a shaky voice.

“Soldier, what’s your name?”

“Alexander, Sir.” Alexander the Great repeated the question. “What is your name?”

“My name is Alexander, Sir.”

Again, more loudly this time, the general demanded, “What is your name?”

“My name is Alexander, Sir,” the soldier meekly answered.

Looking intently at the young man, Alexander the Great said, “Soldier, either change your name or change your conduct.”

The Matchless Name

Names in Bible times carried much more meaning than merely identifying or distinguishing a person. “Names in Scripture represent the very essence of the person. A person’s personality, character, reputation and authority are all wrapped up in his name.”¹ Jacob, whose name means “he deceives,” lived up to the designation by manipulating those around him for selfish gain. That all changed, however, after he wrestled with God at the River Jabbok. There he received a new name, Israel, which means, “he struggles with God” (Gen. 32:28).

A name often suggested power and influence, as was the case with Alexander. Yet no name can ever rise to the heights of the matchless name of Jesus. This is particularly true within the realm of prayer. If learning the intercessory methods of our Lord grants you the “college degree,” then understanding what it means to pray in the name of Jesus takes you to the masters level.

What Does It Mean?

Praying in the name of Jesus doesn’t mean simply closing a prayer with “in Jesus’ name.” It’s not a secret code or magic formula. Author Jack Taylor writes, “To pray in his name is

more than a declaration, it is a disposition.”²

So, if it’s not a matter of voicing three short words, then what is it? Note first that praying in Jesus’ name opens the door or offers admittance to salvation. One Old Testament verse carries such significance that two different New Testament writers quote it. During his powerful sermon at Pentecost, Peter proclaimed to a crowd of Jews, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21; Joel 2:32). Paul included those same words when describing salvation to the church in Rome (Rom. 10:13).

Calling on the name of the Lord and receiving His free gift of salvation is the crucial first step in establishing a relationship with Him. When praying in His name, there is significance in the word admit—both noun and verb—as it relates to our salvation.

Several years ago, an acquaintance invited me to play golf at the Athletic Club of Atlanta, a prestigious course that has hosted many professional tournaments. Arriving at the entry gate with great excitement and anticipation, I gained admission to the grounds by simply giving the security guard the name of the man who invited me.

As a noun, admission means “access.” Paul writes, “In him [Christ] and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence” (Eph. 3:12). Even though the word name doesn’t appear in this verse, the implied truth is that Jesus provided direct passage to God by way of His precious blood that paid the penalty for our sins. He and His name are one.

Scripture says, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb. 4:16, emphasis added). This confidence is certainly not due to our own merit, but it is based on the great High Priest Jesus who paved the way.

As a verb, admit means acknowledging that something is true.

Taylor writes, “When we respond to the command to pray in Jesus’ name, we are admitting the bankruptcy of our own name. We are renouncing our own worth and merit at the throne of grace. We are admitting that in our flesh dwells no good thing, that we have no worth whereby His grace to claim.”³

As we approach God in prayer—in Jesus’ name—we peel away layers of pride and toss aside the cloak of self. We bow before Him on the merits of His Son alone.

Praying under an Assumed Name

This leads nicely into the next truth about praying in the name of Jesus, which is assuming His identity. Identity theft, particularly in this electronic age, is a common, costly crime. Illegally obtaining another person’s Social Security number and credit card number often offers tremendous financial gain as well as a new identity. Identity theft is reprehensible in our temporal world, yet it is encouraged—demanded, in fact—from an eternal perspective.

“To pray in Jesus’ name is to pray under an assumed name.”⁴ Our own names carry no weight, nor do they wield any influence as we kneel in the presence of God. “All our righteous acts are like filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). Yet the name that is above every name—Jesus—unlocks the doors of heaven and rolls out a red carpet to the very throne of God.

When we come to Christ, our identity changes. We are new creations. “The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor. 5:17). That new creation identity, synonymous with Jesus Himself, provides an entrée we could never have on our own.

Closely aligned with assuming Christ’s identity in prayer is interceding by His authority. Since He now resides at the

right hand of the Father, we are His Spirit-filled representatives on this fallen earth, acting by His authority.

God's Word says, "We are . . . Christ's ambassadors" (2 Cor. 5:20). Generally speaking, an ambassador is an authorized attaché or messenger for a high-ranking official. As born-again believers, we are the Lord's representatives on earth, acting by His authority. That authority applies to our prayer lives as well.

Power of Attorney

Praying in the name of Jesus also gives us, in effect, the power of attorney. A power-of-attorney document is a written instrument authorizing a person to act as a representative in private, business, or legal affairs.

In the Kingdom of God, Taylor writes, "Jesus has given every believer unlimited and general power of attorney in all matters and with this the right to use his name in every situation!"⁵ Prayer is one of those occasions.

During his third missionary journey, while in Ephesus, Paul encountered Jews trying to cast out demons in Jesus' name. On one occasion an evil spirit said to the Jews: "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?" (Acts 19:15). The demon-possessed man then turned on the Jewish exorcists, beating them badly.

Common Desires, Common Goals

Praying in Jesus' name means complying with His will. In other words, praying in Christ's name is fruitless unless, by knowing Him, you want what He wants and have His best interests in mind. Scripture promises 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” (1 John 5:14–15).

Praying in His name means sifting through our wants and wishes, making sure they line up with His. We discover His desires by reading the Word, relying on the indwelling Spirit, communicating with mature believers, and using God-given common sense. He’s not going to answer in a way contrary to His character or inconsistent with His Word.

When President Abraham Lincoln was touring a Civil War battlefield, a wounded Union soldier looked up at him and said, “Mr. President, don’t you think that we should pray that God would be on our side?”

Lincoln responded, “Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side, my greatest concern is to be on God’s side, for God is always right.”⁶

I’ll never forget the reply an elderly gentleman gave when I asked him his opinion on a decision that needed to be made. He answered, “Todd, I like what you like.” In other words, he apparently felt we had the same mindset.

Praying in the name of Jesus means aligning ourselves with His will. Aligning ourselves with His will means acknowledging that He’s always right and that we want that rightness to prevail in our lives and in the world. We like what He likes, and we want as many people as possible to like it, too.

The Sheer Joy

Finally, praying in the name of Jesus ignites jubilation. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus said to the disciples, “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and

you will receive and your joy will be complete" (John 16:24).

I recently read that the joy exhibited in the lives of believers is the #1 factor that attracts unsaved people to church. Understanding this, Satan does anything he can to oppress and suppress it. Scripture says he "comes only to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10).

Our salvation is safe because of the blood of Jesus and His solid grip on our souls. Knowing that, the adversary and his henchmen will do all within their power to steal our joy. Bold and consistent prayer in the name of Jesus helps establish joy in our lives, while at the same time building a wall of protection to keep the enemy away.

An unbeliever in Africa was taken prisoner of war. Around his neck, he wore a charm with a small leather case attached. When this was taken away from him one day, he went into a mad frenzy, begging that it be returned. He was even prepared to sacrifice his right hand for it. As it turned out, the little amulet that he valued as life itself contained a small piece of paper, on which was written the word God. He thought that simply wearing this charm protected him from evil. When, at last, the amulet was returned to him, he was so overjoyed that he cried, fell to the ground, and kissed the feet of the man who gave it back to him.

The name of Jesus goes far beyond words written on paper or a phrase voiced to conclude a prayer. Transformed by His name, with humbled heart, we receive salvation of our souls, admission to His presence, identification with His Person, authorization to minister on His behalf, unification with His will, and jubilation in His name.

Discover the unsearchable things that await those willing to do what it takes to pray in His name. "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know" (Jer. 33:3).

¹allaboutprayer.org/in-the-name-of-jesus-faq.htm.²Jack R. Taylor, *Prayer: Life's Limitless Reach* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1977), 69.³*Ibid*, 71.⁴*Ibid*.⁵*Ibid*.⁶brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/a/abraham_lincoln.html.

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