

# **Book Review: *In Jesus' Name: Johannine Prayer in Ethical, Missional, and Eschatological Perspective***

Adams, Scott. 2022. *In Jesus' Name: Johannine Prayer in Ethical, Missional, and Eschatological Perspective*. Eugene: Pickwick. xiv + 98 pp. ISBN: 978-1-6667-3241-2. Approx. 364.10 ZAR (\$20 USD). Paperback.

With his second book on prayer in the Johannine tradition, Scott Adams builds on the foundation he laid with his earlier study, *Prayer in John's Farewell Discourse: An Exegetical Investigation* (Pickwick, 2020). In his more recent monograph, aptly titled, *In Jesus' Name*, Adams compares the perspective on prayer presented in John's Farewell Discourse (John 14–16) with attitudes reflected in other portions of the Johannine corpus, specifically 1 John, 3 John, and Revelation. Adams's goal is not to argue for a particular understanding of the authorship of these biblical texts (though he does see them as part of a connected tradition). Rather, Adams seeks to illuminate the message concerning prayer found in these inspired writings by analyzing and comparing them. In this way, Adams is able to isolate distinctive aspects, while also highlighting important points of continuity. The result is a concise, informative, and edifying analysis of prayer in Johannine perspective. As with his earlier book, *In Jesus' Name* is marked by helpful interaction with current scholarship, solid exegesis, and informed theological reflection. Additionally, this book reflects the breadth of Adams's

own ministry. Adams serves on the faculty of the Regent University School of Divinity (Virginia) and as the lead pastor at the Midtown Location of Our Savior's Church in Lafayette, Louisiana. Thus, he has one foot in the world of the academy and one in the church. Adams beautifully blends the academic and the pastoral in this recent volume with his eye for application, which is highlighted most clearly in his final chapter on contemporary application. This quality, in addition to the rhetorical power of Adams's prose, makes *In Jesus' Name* valuable for pastors and parishioners as well as scholars.

*In Jesus' Name* begins with the foundation (ch. 2); the way in which prayer functions in the Gospel of John and, more specifically, in the Farewell Discourse (FD). Prayer in the FD is “motivated by esteem for Jesus' name and all that his name represents.” As a result, Johannine prayer flows from “the disciples' relationship with Jesus” (p. 17). Adams explains, “Praying on the basis of one's union with [Christ] not only involves making petitions according to the motivation of love as assumed in the Decalogue, but it involves making requests on the basis of Jesus' words and example (John 13:15; 34)” (p. 21). Johannine prayer is ethical in that it calls for the welfare of other believers as well as the salvation of the unbelieving world. The ethical and the missional are intertwined in that “prayer according to Jesus' love-ethic serves as one of the means by which individuals in the world become the friends of Jesus and members of the community of God” (p. 24).

Chapters 3–5 then progressively build by comparing this foundational understanding of prayer with that presented in 1 John (ch. 3), 3 John (ch. 4), and Revelation (ch. 5). In chapter 3 Adams provides helpful context for the promises of 1 John 3:21–22 (“Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him”) and 5:14–15 (“And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we

ask anything according to his will he hears us”). By comparing these texts with John 14:1, 12–14, and 15:1–7 he demonstrates that the Johannine tradition presents “belief in Jesus, the efficacy of his name, and abiding in him” as the basis for one’s confidence in prayer. This confidence in prayer is implied in the FD, but it is explicitly stated in 1 John. So, the FD and 1 John “employ slightly different vocabulary but portray the same optimistic outcomes” of prayer (p. 43).

In chapter 4 Adams offers detailed commentary on 3 John 2 and, through his comparison of this text with John 14:12–14, 15:7, and 17:1–16, he argues in a convincing fashion that “the Elder not only wished for Gaius’s prosperity, but he prayed for it to come to pass for the sake of ‘the name’ and the mission of God.” Adams suggests that “the Elder’s prayer-wish and Gaius’s prosperity” illustrate “how God chose to preserve the Johannine emissaries as they carried forth their mission” in a hostile world (p. 61).

In chapter 5 Adams contrasts prayer in the FD with “the prayers of the saints” in Revelation. The former is offered for the *continuation* of God’s mission; the latter in anticipation of the *completion* of God’s mission. In Revelation 5:8, 6:10, and 8:3–4, prayer is pictured as contributing to the vindication of the martyr-saints and the completion of God’s final judgment. Here prayer is “the means by which the saints participate in” the eschatological drama (p. 79). Adams observes,

The martyr’s cry and God’s response to them would naturally provide encouragement for the saints in John’s day and for believers throughout history who are facing eschatological labor pains. The answer to their prayer-cries may be delayed, but their requests will not be denied. (pp. 73–74)

Adams’s work serves to broaden our perspective on prayer in several important ways. First, in Christian communities often torn between the extremes promulgated by prosperity preachers on the one hand and gloomy, “just hang on until the end” cessationists on the other, Adams’s balanced approach to prayer is refreshing. He insists that “faithful disciples will not ask for anything that precludes Jesus’ character and mission” (p. 57). Thus, he rejects attempts to read “the Elder’s prayer wish [3 John 2] as the means for all Christians to obtain health and wealth.” And yet, at the same time, Adams wisely cautions, we “must not entirely minimize the Elder’s prayer-wish to the point of precluding any expectation for material blessing” (p. 55). The key here is found in prayer that prioritizes God’s glory and mission over our self-interest or comfort. This leads to my second observation.

Adams rightly grounds Johannine prayer in the mission of the church. The Elder prays for Gaius’s prosperity “to come to pass for the sake of ‘the name’ and the mission of God.” As Adams notes, this accords well with the FD, “where prayer is prescribed for the fruitfulness of the believing community” (p. 61). Finally, this ethical balance in prayer is facilitated by a proper understanding of biblical eschatology. Indeed, “Revelation reminds us that our eschatological hopes may be delayed, but they will not be denied.” Since we pray in the name of the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:16), we can have confidence in spite of the spiritual battle that rages around us. I concur with Adams, we “should articulate a theology of victory” in our prayers, both private and corporate (p. 88). Our prayers should reflect the hope that is within us—a hope that cries out, “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 21:1; 22:20).

I would note, however, that the cry of the martyrs, “How Long, O Lord...?” (Rev 6:10) encourages us to add lament, along with shouts of victory, to our repertoire of prayers. In view of the tendency of those in Pentecostal or Charismatic churches to adopt uncritically an over-realized

eschatology (I say this as a Pentecostal), perhaps more emphasis on the “not yet” aspect of the “already/not yet” tension that marks our present existence would be helpful. Paul’s reference to another prayer-cry, “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Rom 8:26; see also v. 23), moves in a similar direction.

Johannine prayer, and particularly the prayer-cry of Revelation 6:10, raises other important questions. Is prayer simply listening and learning? Or could it be, as Adams suggests, that when we pray, we actually participate in God’s redemptive, transforming work? And do these prayers need to be cognitive and articulate in order to be edifying and efficacious? Here placing this Johannine perspective in dialogue with Paul’s *Abba*-cry (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6; see also Mark 14:36) and his many references to praying and singing in the Spirit (1 Cor 14:14–15; Eph 5:18–19; 6:18; Col 3:16; see also 1 Thess 5:16–19 and Jude 20) might be productive.

These references to Paul highlight the fact that Adams’s fruitful study of prayer in Johannine perspective is incomplete. What insights might be gleaned if he were to broaden this biblical dialogue on prayer to include other New Testament authors? I think now especially of Luke, who provides us with a wealth of material on prayer and connects prayer with the empowering work of the Holy Spirit in a special way (Luke 3:21; 11:13). Does this Lukan emphasis find its counterpart in texts like John 14:26, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name” (John 14:26)?

All of this reminds us that it is no small thing to pray in Jesus’s name, and we should not take this incredible privilege lightly. Adams’s exhortation not to pray in Jesus’s name in “a flippant, irreverent manner” is rooted in a marvelous truth: “God has given his name to Jesus, and Jesus has, in

turn, given believers permission to use his name in prayer” (p. 85). May we, like Jesus, pray with Spirit-inspired joy and expectation (Luke 10:21) as we marvel at God’s gracious desire to hear our prayers and to act.

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