

Sermon 7/28/2019

Many people become frustrated and disappointed with praying; it does not seem to work for them. Maybe you are in that position? Today I offer you a “master class.” We have a lesson in praying from an expert— some tips from that Rabbi from Nazareth whom we know as Jesus, our Christ and Savior.

The disciples came to him asking: “*Master, teach us how to pray.*” He dealt with their request in three phases. First: he gave an example of prayer. Secondly: he told a story about a man who needed bread at midnight. Thirdly: he talked about a parent responding to a child’s request for food. Today I am going to try and follow this simple lesson outline that Jesus gave.

The *Lord’s Prayer*, we call it. We are so used to it that it is hard to look at it afresh. But if we make the effort, we will notice two things: it is incredibly brief, and yet remarkably encompassing. Now that is something! There have been times when I have suffered from some marathon pray-ers. In contrast, Jesus covered everything in about 30 seconds—

Father, your name is revered. Your domain be established. Provide us with the bread we need day by day—or, daily. Forgive us our sins, since we too forgive everyone in debt to us. And don’t make us face the test.

An extremely literal, bare-bones translation! The version we’re most familiar with comes from Matthew 6:9-13 There is nothing narrow, limited, or reserved about it. Think about how much ground Jesus covered.

“*Father, your name is revered.*” It takes us away from the weakness and folly of this world; it puts God first. Here we have worship; not religious self-pity.

“*Your domain—your kingdom, your rule— be established.*” This lifts us above immediate and petty wants to the ultimate well-being of all. Our eyes are taken above the ant hills to the lofty heights of God’s destiny for humanity.

“*Provide us with the bread we need day by day.*” It is prayer for basics, not luxuries. It is also a prayer for the world family, not a limited request for my personal need. This is very unlike some of the “want lists” that often sneak into our prayers. After the request for basic physical needs, comes one for our personal spiritual needs—

“*Forgive us our sins, for we too forgive everyone in debt to us.*” We seek the mercy of God to set us free: to liberate us from both the crippling burden of own sins, and from the self-inflicted damage that is the inevitable consequence of holding grudges against others. Yes, we’re asking for a pretty big favor here, so why shouldn’t we be expected to do the same? The final sentence is a cry from the depths of the human heart; a recognition of our frailty in the face of trials—

“*And don’t make us face the test*”. We pray not to be challenged in our faith or by blatant temptations...and the subtle ones that are always at hand. End of Lesson 1. Remember that I said it took Jesus about 30 seconds to utter this brief prayer? It has taken me at least five minutes to make these few comments about

it! Ironically, Jesus' prayer covers the realm of Christian belief from why God matters to why we matter to God.

Lesson 2. The second lesson in this master class comes in the form of a story. At midnight a man has an unexpected guest seeking hospitality. But there is no food in the cupboard. He has a neighbor who is a friend, one he feels he can dare go to in the middle of the night. Notice, midnight! The neighbor must be a really good one! So he goes and knocks on the door, waking the poor guy up. The neighbor is not exactly thrilled to be dragged from bed. Nevertheless, because of the benign impudence of the requester, he gives the petitioner the bread he asks for. "*There!*" says Jesus, "*Ask, seek, knock....at any time of day or night. You will not be ignored by God.*" It is important in this story to note an analogy with prayer—the request is not for himself but for another. The midnight prayer is for a needy traveler. There is nothing selfish here. It is for the needs of other travelers through life for whom we are told to ask, seek and knock on God's door. The story is not about nagging God for more goodies; it's about caring for others. End of Prayer Lesson number 2.

The third lesson from the Rabbi pivots on the words "*How much more*". Jesus talks about what it means to be a good parent. If a child asks for a fish to eat, a parent will not give a snake. If an egg is requested, the good parent will not put a stone on the child's plate. Contaminated by evil though we are, we know to give good food to our children. Well, most of the time! Don't let us get started on junk food!

"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" You will notice again that Jesus is talking about basics. Good, basic food, not luxuries for the over-pampered. Fish and eggs were the main source of protein in the common person's diet. Not sturgeon, but plain stubby little fish from Lake Galilee; the ones now called *St Peter's fish*, or *tilapia*. And eggs, not caviar but common hens' eggs. Plain basics!

Please note the precious gift Jesus assumes we will be asking for: *How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.* This is the real thing we should be asking for—more of the Holy Spirit, more of God intimately working in and through us. More of God's Presence. More of God's love, truth and comfort. More of his justice, wisdom, compassion and joy. This is the good thing God wants to give to those who ask.

Maybe we don't always want more from God; we expect more from our own plans and purposes, ambitions and comforts. Maybe we want more of our pride, stubbornness and ego. Perhaps we are afraid that if we have more of the Holy Spirit in our lives we may need to change in unpalatable ways. Maybe we prefer our religion in moderation rather than a full dosage, and therefore we limit the depth of our asking. How much more is God ready to do for you? End of Lesson 3.

in this Master class. Jesus makes three points about prayer according to *Luke*:

1. An Example: A prayer that is God centered and cares about others, as well as

ourselves. It is our Parent, as it were, in heaven who is worshipped, from whom our daily bread is requested, by whom our sins forgiven, and to whom in times of enticements we turn for help. 2. A Story: A man who for the sake of a hungry guest, dares wake a neighbor at midnight asking for bread. God is open morning, noon and night as we pour out our hearts in concern for others. 3. A Comparison: Earthly parenting and God's parenting. How much more than the simple basics of life will God give the Holy Spirit to those who ask.

Maybe times of prayer are not so difficult, not so onerous as many seem to think? If any should find it an onerous duty, the cause may be a lack of self-honesty? It could be, that we don't really want to learn the lessons Jesus has for us? Or maybe we are reluctant to embrace the risks involved in asking God for more of the Holy Spirit? What do you think?