

How to Get What you Ask for from God...

Luke 11:1-13

The Lord's Prayer is found in Matthew and in Luke. We talked about it already when we went through what we call The Sermon on the Mount. It is interesting to observe that the Lord's prayer is given to make completely different points in each of these two gospels. In Matthew 6, the sermon distinguishes sincere expressions of spiritual devotion from those disciplines that were popularly practiced in Jesus' day in order to win the approval and admiration of men rather than God. So, Jesus addressed almsgiving, prayer and fasting and showed how they should be done in contrast to how they were commonly practiced. In respect to prayer, Jesus showed that standing on the street corners or in the synagogue while offering eloquent prayers meant to impress the crowd was improper. Prayer should be made from the closet, secretly, in order to please God. If your prayers were to be overheard, it should not seem as if you think that God is hard of hearing or that He has forgotten your requests or as if He needs to be told what He should do. Instead, the pray-er should express confidence that God already knows what you have on your mind and that He is already answering even as you speak.

Then, to demonstrate what prayer should be about, Jesus gave what we call the Lord's prayer. The context assumes that the listener is interested in properly practicing the discipline of prayer as a sincere minded and godly person should. Prayer as such has as its purpose to come into the presence of God and to commune with Him and experience an intimacy with God. Such praying should begin with praise and worship that honors the Lord. The prayer should acknowledge God's will and agree that it must be the pray-er's priority to see that will accomplished just as this is what God desires and works toward. The prayer should freely bring his daily needs before the Lord and confidently ask Him to provide for these needs. The prayer should confess his conscious commitments to obey the Lord and to honor what he knows to be God's will, forgiving those who have offended you being a specific example of this kind of obedience and

possibly one of the more challenging issues to stay on the right side of. The prayer should be aware of his own vulnerability to temptation and of the determination of the evil one and so God's grace and help must be sought. In the end, the outcome of every seeming uncertainty is assured. God will have the victory for His is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen.

In Luke, the occasion of the prayer is entirely different. Jesus had come back from praying and the disciples having a powerful sense of just how close Jesus was to God asked Him, "Lord, teach us to pray..." but, possibly feeling that what Jesus had in prayer was for some reason not available to them, they added the argument (with a bit of a sense of deprivation) "as John also taught his disciples." They felt somehow that John's disciples had an advantage on them in this matter. But what was it about prayer that they wanted to learn? To be close to God? To pray eloquently? To change themselves or others? To receive strength or direction or power? How can we know except possibly in the answer that Jesus gave to them. If Jesus did answer the thought or motive that was behind the question then we can read the answer into the question and discover what the disciples really wanted to know. When you do that you discover that what the disciples really wanted to know was, how can you pray and then get what you ask for from God?

To answer them, Jesus first reminded them of what He had taught them when He gave them the Lord's prayer. He repeated this prayer. Do you want to get what you want from God when you pray? Then, you have to remember what prayer is about. Prayer is about giving praise to God and worshipping Him. When we remember who He is then we recognize the reality and importance of His will. We understand the potential of blessing for those who join Him in what He is doing. He encourages us to bring our daily needs to Him. He expects us to practice the principle of forgiveness, and actually to put into practice all of His teachings. He wants us to be humble about our spirituality and to know that we will never get to a place where we are beyond the reach of the devil. Those who are humble continue to seek the protection and grace of the One who can and will deliver us from the evil one.

Then, after offering these words of caution, Jesus spoke to what was really on the minds of the disciples. He posed a circumstance that we can easily imagine.

"Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him. And he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you?' I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs." Put yourself into the story. The man takes his request to his friend at midnight and then his friend tells him all the reasons that he cannot get up and answer the door and then give him what he is asking for. The door is shut. The children are with him in bed. It is way too inconvenient a time for answering the door. But then the man persists in asking. Did he repeat his question verbatim? That would be unnatural. If someone tells you why they cannot do something you would want to respond by showing them that it truly is possible that they could do it. You might argue, (quietly) there is no reason to wake the children, just carefully get up and give me the bread I need for my friend. And then the friend protests that every time I get up in the night it upsets the kids and then you assure him that they'll go back to sleep soon enough its just that you had no idea your friend was coming and he really is starving and you know that if the circumstances were reversed that I would be glad to help you in fact, you've already asked me to help you shoe your horse next week and you know that I promised to help and you know I will so please just let me have some bread.

So, what is Jesus teaching? Prayer is like arguing with God. And, we should recognize that arguments tend to go places on the way to their destinations especially when you argue with God because what soon becomes obvious is that we do not always begin our prayers of asking with God's will as our first priority. So we ask God and when He does not respond right away with the "yes" we desire we continue to ask but in the process what we are asking may change. We argue with the apparent reasons for God's "no" and find the need to correct our request. "No, Lord, I don't have to have a new car, just a car that can reliably get

me to work." "No Lord, I don't have to have the union job but please, help me find a job that will cover my health insurance."

So Jesus said ask and keep on asking. Seek and keep on seeking. Knock and keep on knocking. By doing so you will receive and find and the doors will be opened to you.

But there is a difference between the man seeking help from his friend and what it is like for us to ask God to give us what we want from Him. The interests of the man and his friend conflicted. The man needed bread with which to feed his other friend. His friend just wanted to be left alone so that he and his family could get a good night's rest. The bread was given grudgingly. In contrast, God always has our best interests in mind. His motives are as pure as those of a father who only wants good for his son. And, if we, in our sinful humanity, are able to give a good gift, how much more is God, who has no sin and who only wants what is best for us, able to give us the very best gifts in response to our prayers. So pray. Keep on asking and seeking and knocking. Argue with God's no and don't be afraid to adjust for His will is always best. Keep at it until you get to "yes"!

