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61 'LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY'

(Luke 11: 1-13)

R. NORTH

Sometimes, when we listen to men who are accustomed to speaking to God in prayer, we feel like exclaiming: 'Lord, teach us to pray'! How much more, when we consider the place which prayer had in the life of the Lord Himself! Omitting our Lord's words to Peter, 'I have prayed for thee. . . .' (Luke 22:32); and His prayer at Calvary, 'Father forgive them. . . .' (Luke 23:34), Luke in his Gospel records at least seven instances of

Our Lord's praying

Luke alone tells us that our Lord was praying at His baptism (Luke 3:21). Someone has said, it is as though the opened heavens, the descending dove, the Father's voice, were the answer to His prayer. His baptism in Jordan was the figure and pledge of the baptism of suffering to which He referred when He said: 'I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished' (Luke 12:50). His praying carries our thoughts to the days of His flesh, when He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him out of death (Heb. 5:7; R.V. marg.). The voice out of heaven was a foreshadowing of the Son's being heard, in resurrection, for His godly fear.

After healing a man full of leprosy, great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. Instead of yielding to the popularity of the moment, 'He withdrew Himself into the wilderness, and prayed' (Luke 5:16). How significant this action between the healing of the leper and the healing of a paralytic! Only God could heal the leper (cp. 2 Kings 5:7). Only God could forgive sins (Luke 5:21). Although our Lord was truly God, He was also truly Man, in dependence upon God, evidenced by His praying.

Because He had healed a man with a withered hand on the sabbath, the Scribes and Pharisees were filled with madness, and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus. What was His reaction to such unreasoning fury? What was the

mind of God? Luke tells us, 'It came to pass in those days that He went out into a mountain to pray; and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples; and of them He chose twelve whom also He named apostles' (Luke 6:12, 13). The call and the choice of the twelve were His own, the exercise of His Divine sovereignty; but it was a sovereignty exercised in dependence upon God, the outcome of His night in prayer.

Luke is the only writer to inform us that 'He was alone praying' when He asked His disciples: 'Whom say the people that I am?' (Luke 9:18). Signs had been given, miracles had been performed, the most perfect testimony had been rendered as to Who He was, but the people could only advance idle opinions and speculations, all of which fell short of the truth. Turning to His disciples, He said: 'But Whom say ye that I am?' Peter, taught by the Father, said: 'The Christ of God'. All the Synoptists tell us that our Lord charged His disciples that they should tell no man He was the Christ, and that He began to show them how He must suffer many things, and be rejected and slain, and be raised the third day. He accepted His rejection. How keenly He felt it may be gathered from Luke's preface: 'He was alone, praying'.

The Synoptic Gospels record, in slightly varying forms, that our Lord took Peter, James and John into a high mountain apart, and that He was transfigured before them. Luke alone tells us that our Lord 'went up into the mountain to pray, and as He prayed the fashion of His countenance was altered' (Luke 9:28, 29). HIS majesty (2 Peter 1:16) was very different from the shining of the skin of Moses' face (Exodus 34:29), from the face of Stephen (Acts 6:15), and from anything that we may experience: but who can deny the transforming power of prayer?

Our Lord's prayer in Gethsemane is recorded in each of the Synoptic Gospels, with distinctions which cannot be noted here. But it was not only in the great crises of His life that our Lord prayed. Prayer with Him was habitual, the atmosphere in which He lived and moved, a necessity of His life. Our natural thoughts might lead us to believe He did not need such seasons of retirement; but the facts are recorded that they might have

their due effect upon us. If He in the midst of His activities, sought the solitude of the desert, or the mountain side, to be alone with His Father, how much more is the solitary place necessary for us?

Luke 11:1 is a further indication that prayer was habitual with the Lord. It was 'as He was praying in a certain place' that, when He ceased, one of them said to Him: 'Lord teach us to pray, as John also taught His disciples'. They must have remembered these seasons of holy retirement in the life of our Lord when they said: 'We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word' (Acts 6:4). Recognising the Word of God as their sphere of service, they put prayer first. The connection between the Word of God and prayer may be seen in the context here: in the closing verses of chapter 10 we have the delightful picture of Mary, who 'also sat at Jesus' feet, listening to His Word'; in the opening verses of chapter 11 our Lord teaches His disciples how to pray. For the maintenance of our own spiritual life we need the Word of God and prayer. If we would be guided aright, and sustained in our service for the Lord, we need to give ourselves continually to prayer and to the Word of God.

We are not told what John taught his disciples to pray, but our Lord gave to His disciples

A Divine Pattern

He taught them how to address God, and in what order their requests should follow. The first three petitions concern the Father's Name and glory: Thy Name, Thy Kingdom, Thy Will. The remaining four petitions relate to the disciples' needs: 'give us', 'forgive us', 'lead us not', 'deliver us'. It was not intended to be a rigid formula. It was a perfect pattern for our Lord's disciples, in their position and circumstances at the time. It is a perfect pattern for us, in its directness, brevity and simplicity; and we may well give heed to the Divine injunction: 'After this manner pray ye'.

The address:

'WHEN YE PRAY, SAY, OUR FATHER'. It is certain that John did not teach *his* disciples to say, 'Our Father'. No one knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him (Matt. 11:27). How great the privilege of being able to call him Father! We are apt to forget that men like Moses and Samuel and Daniel could never address God in this way. But, although our Lord taught His disciples to say 'Our Father', He did not include Himself with them, as though He and they were on the same level of relationship. His own unique relationship with the Father is always carefully guarded.

The Father's Name and glory being of paramount concern to His Son, three relevant petitions follow.

'HALLOWED BE THY NAME'. This is not a pious sentiment. It ought to be our first desire that our Father's Name shall be held in reverence by all men. But if we would truly utter this prayer we must be reverent in our approach to Him, and allow nothing inconsistent with the sanctity of His Name in our lives.

'THY KINGDOM COME'. Although the kingdom is one, various expressions are used to describe it, such as the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of the Son of Man. The particular aspect in view here in the Father's kingdom, in which the righteous shall shine forth as the sun (Matt. 13:43). As we look around in the world today, and see the increasing lawlessness of men and remember the bright and glowing prophecies of the coming kingdom, we may well pray 'Thy kingdom come'. The sincerity of our petition will be evidenced by the practical acknowledgement of His rule in our own lives.

'THY WILL BE DONE, AS IN HEAVEN, SO IN EARTH.' The purpose of man naturally is to do his own will. He may be happy to allow the thought of the Father's will being done in heaven, so long as man's will is not interfered with on earth. The contrast is seen in the Second Man, the Lord out of heaven. Even in Gethsemane's garden He said: 'Not as I will, but as Thou wilt' (Matt. 26:39); 'Not what I will, but what Thou wilt' (Mark 14:36); 'Not My will but Thine, be done' (Luke 22:42). How

fittingly therefore, he could teach His disciples to pray these words, which, on our lips, will ring true as we anticipate their fulfilment in the world to come by doing His will now.

The Disciples' Needs:

'GIVE US DAY BY DAY OUR DAILY BREAD.' The disciples, who had left all and followed the Lord, are taught the necessity of daily dependence on their Father for the bread that perisheth; and, at the same time, to express their confidence in His daily care for them. He taught them to ask for bread sufficient for each day's needs. Agur said: 'Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me; lest I be full and deny Thee, and say Who is Jehovah? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and use profanely the Name of my God' (Prov. 30:8, 9; R.V.). It would be pertinent to ask ourselves whether *we* would be content with bread sufficient for each day's needs. It is common (and perhaps justifiable) to give these words a spiritual application, and to recognise that this petition had a special literal application to our Lord's disciples at the time; but many have since proved that, although daily dependence even on the Father is trying to the flesh, the One Who sustained Elijah is still responsive to His children's daily needs.

'FORGIVE US OUR SINS; FOR WE ALSO FORGIVE EVERYONE THAT IS INDEBTED TO US.' This evidently does not refer to the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of God's grace, through the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ; but to the disciple's forgiveness under the daily government of his Father. An unforgiving spirit in a child of God is a barrier to the enjoyment of communion with the Father; hence the nature of this petition, which supposes that 'we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us.'

'AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION.' Although we know that temptation is the common lot of men, when we ourselves are tested and tried we are apt to think that our own trials are worse than other people's trials. What a comfort it is to know that, God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted

above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it' (1 Cor. 10:13). We know that 'God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man' (James 1:13), to do evil. He may test our faith, with a view to strengthening it, as He tried Abraham (Heb. 11:17), and as our Lord proved Philip (John 6:6). But if we are self-confident, we shall soon discover that the least temptation is too strong for us. Who, that knows anything of the weakness of his own heart, would desire to be brought into temptation, and put to the proof? Rather would we pray: 'Lead us not into temptation.'

'BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL'; or, as some read, 'from the Evil One.' The word 'deliver' is said to be a military term, denoting the deliverance of a prisoner who has fallen into the hands of the enemy. 'The evil one' (sometimes translated 'the wicked one' Matt. 13:19; Eph. 6:16; 1 John 2:13, 14) is a most malignant foe, who assails us through the evil in our own hearts. That is why he could never obtain any advantage over our Lord, Who alone could say: 'The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me' (John 14:30). Knowing, as He did, the power of the evil one, and our own inherent weakness, He asked His Father to keep those whom the Father had given Him 'out of the evil' (John 17:15).

Divine Encouragement

The Parable of the Importunate Friend

Verses 5 to 8 are peculiar to Luke, and are an encouragement to importunity and perseverance in prayer. To call on a friend at midnight is to call at a most unseasonable hour, and to endanger the bonds of friendship. So, in the parable, a request at such a time elicited the sharp reply: 'Trouble me not; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.' Yet persistency achieved the object desired! What an encouragement for us to come to Him Who neither slumbers nor sleeps, Who is never annoyed or wearied with our continual coming, and Who is far more willing to hear and answer than we are to ask. Although the lesson of Luke 18:1-8 is similar to

that of Luke 11:5-8, the parable is different. There it is a judge, who feared not God, nor regarded man; and a widow, who had no claim upon him, asking him to avenge her of her adversary. Here it is a friend, pleading the claim of friendship on behalf of another friend. In both cases persistence is successful. If a godless judge, out of sheer exasperation, would give to a woman what she persisted in asking for, merely to get rid of her; and if a friend would give to another friend for much the same reason; how much more will our Father, out of His infinite love and compassion, hear and answer the cry of His children and undertake our cause?

The application of the parable is given by the Lord Himself:

'I say unto you, Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you' (v. 9). The tense of the verbs indicates that we are to be asking continually until it is given to us, that we are to be seeking continually until we find, that we are to be knocking continually until the door is opened. He assures us that our asking, seeking, knocking will be answered. 'For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened' (v. 10). He does not say, everyone that asketh receiveth the thing he asks for; that is conditional (cp. 1 John 3:22; 5:14, 15). To give a child all he asks for would not be parental love, but parental weakness mistaking indulgence for love. Real love does not always give what is asked for, but what is best. We shall, however, miss the point of the parable unless we learn to be specific in our requests, and importunate in prayer for others. The character of our Father's giving is intimated in verses 11 to 13. What earthly parent, in response to his son's asking, would, for a loaf, give him a stone? instead of a fish, give him a serpent? for an egg, offer him a scorpion? And will our Father mock us, provoke us to anger, by giving us that which is useless or injurious, when we ask Him for journeying necessities? 'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give (not merely 'good gifts', as in Matt. 7:11, but) the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?' (v. 13). We must remember that these words were spoken before the cross,

and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We do not now ask for the Holy Spirit, for we have already received Him. We ought to desire to be continually 'filled with the Spirit' (Eph. 5:18); but to pray for the Holy Spirit to be given, after He has come, would be to forget one of the distinctive features of Christianity, and to be unaware of the fact that 'the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost Who is given unto us' (Rom. 5:5). But the precious lesson abides: if an earthly father's love can be trusted to give good gifts unto his children, how much more can we trust our Father to give what is best to us?

THE PROPHECIES OF DANIEL

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II. The Four Beasts of Daniel's Visions

The record of Daniel's visions in the seventh chapter of the book concludes the portion of the book written in the Chaldee or Aramaic language. They occurred to the prophet in the first year of the reign of King Belshazzar (Dan. 7:1), a ruler not mentioned by the Babylonian historians, Berosus and Abydenus, but frequently mentioned on tablets excavated by Sir Henry Rawlinson from the ruins of ancient Babylon as son and vice-regent of King Nabonidus who, according to Berosus, was the last king of Babylon. The wife of Nabonidus and mother of Belshazzar was a daughter of King Nebuchadnezzar who is in Dan. 5:2, 18 referred to as the father of Belshazzar. When interpreting the writing on the wall, Daniel addressed Belshazzar as Nebuchadnezzar's son. The Chaldean language had no word for 'grandfather' or 'grandson', hence the use of the words 'father' and 'son' to indicate the relationship. The four chapters in Daniel following on Chapter 2 are purely historical and contain the inspired account of the outstanding events in Babylon, the first great world-empire, from the Divine standpoint and in relation to Daniel and his companions, and the early years of the Medo-Persian Empire. Each incident demonstrates the strength and weakness, the glory and the ruin, of human dominion in