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NT 610 Synoptic Gospels

May 5, 1987

Jesus on Prayer

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- I. **Intro:** As we face the countless problems of daily living in our hectic world we often feel the need to consult experts to help us cope or to give us answers.
- A. Just open any newspaper and chances are you will be able to find one or more of the popular, so-called advice columns (e.g. Ann Landers, Dear Abby, etc.).
 - B. As Christians we know that the Bible is the best place for us to look to for advice for living. (Some have called it our “owner’s manual!”)
 - C. Nevertheless, if you are like me, you will admit that there are times (maybe often!) when you wish you could ask Jesus a question in person.
 - 1. You may have wondered what it would have been like to have been one of Jesus’ disciples for whom this was possible.
 - 2. You may remember all of the times in the gospels where we read that the disciples were able to walk right up to Jesus and ask him a question.
 - 3. Questions come just as easy for us as it did for the disciples. There is always something that we don’t understand.
 - D. But you may be surprised to find out that for all of the disciple’s questions only once did they ask the Lord to teach them something!
 - E. Jesus was constantly trying to teach them but only once did they specifically request it.
 - F. What was it that they requested to be taught? What would you have asked Jesus to teach you if you were there?
 - G. Today we are going to look at how Jesus responded when the disciples requested that he **teach** them to **pray**.
 - H. Of all the gospels Luke contains the most material on prayer.
 - 1. Other than what is in common with the other gospels, Luke includes 7 additional passages 2 of which are parables.
 - 2. 11:1-13 is a rather long, sustained section on prayer.
 - 3. In it Jesus teaches his disciples (and us) what the content of prayer should include, that we should pray with persistence and that we should have an attitude of expectancy anticipating only what is good from God.
- II. Jesus teaches the **content** of prayer. (verses 1-4)
- A. Chapter 11 begins with a familiar scene—Jesus praying.
 - 1. Jesus is seen praying at all the major turning points of his life:
 - a) at his baptism—3:21

- b) before his conflicts with the authorities—5:16
 - c) all night before he chose the 12—6:12
 - d) before he predicted his passion—9:18
 - e) before his transfiguration—9:28
 - f) here, on the occasion of his disciples asking to be taught to pray—11:1
 - g) as he faced his suffering—22:41
 - h) as he forgave those who crucified him—23:34
 - i) as he gave up his life—23:46
2. The disciples **must** have been **impressed** by Jesus’ habit of personal prayer! (Edmonds)
 3. On this occasion, after he had finished, one of disciples asked him to teach them to pray too.
- B. The disciples also add (as another reason) that they want Jesus to teach them to pray “just as John also taught his disciples.”
1. Prayer inevitably expresses what one truly believes. (Liefeld)
 2. Prayers of the first century (as today) were characteristic of the group that one belonged to.
 - a) E.g. someone with a Catholic background might be recognized as such if they were to recite a “Hail Mary”, etc.
 - b) Jesus’ disciples knew that John’s disciples had been taught to pray in such a way as to be distinctly associated with him.
 - c) They wanted to learn how to confidently express Jesus’ own teachings in prayer.
 3. Jesus obliges them by teaching them what we know as the “Lord’s Prayer.”
- C. In verse 2 Jesus says “When you pray...”
1. Although not meant to be thoughtlessly repeated (Matt. 6:7), this implies frequent repetition of the actual prayer. (Liefeld)
 2. It was also intended as a model for other prayers.
 3. In case it has become **too** familiar to us lets take a fresh look at some of the highlights:
- D. Luke’s version begins very simply by addressing God Almighty as “Father” (contrasted to the elaborate addresses used in many Jewish prayers). (Fitzmyer)
1. We are familiar with this form of addressing God in prayer and so cannot easily imagine what a new and utterly amazing concept this would have been to the disciples!
 2. God is referred to as “Father” in the OT but only in a corporate, national, or covenantal sense and rarely (if ever) by an individual as a personal address. (Fitzmyer)
 3. Jesus probably used the Aramaic word **Abba** (Daddy) which we find in John 20:17 and Rom. 8:14-17.

4. This was a term used to express the intimate relationship that Jesus enjoyed with his Father.
5. Jesus was now making this **same** close relationship available to everyone through his atoning work.
6. That is the only reason why we can call on God as “Father”.

“Through his atoning death on the cross, the Savior brought about reconciliation with God, making it possible for us to become his spiritual children through the new birth.” (Liefeld)

7. Have you let this sink in to the point of affecting your life lately?
 - a) It may seem like those of us who have been blessed with earthly fathers who have been good to us have an advantage in understanding what it means to call God “Father”.
 - b) But none of us needs to wonder what the “ideal” father would be like because we can “see” him as he relates to Jesus!
 - c) **That’s** were we get our understanding of what it is like to have God as our Father!
 8. This is a great concept to meditate on! I am reminded of the hymn “I’m a Child of the King”...
- E. “Hallowed be your (thy) name”—What does “hallowed” mean?!
1. One youngster misunderstood it to be “**Harold** be your name!”
 2. Means: “let your name be regarded as holy.” In this way, “It is not so much a petition as an act of worship.” (Liefeld)
 3. It is therefore similar to our “Praise the Lord” in that as we say “May the Lord be praised” we are actually praising the Lord and not just exhorting others to praise him!
- F. “Thy Kingdom come”—a request that the promise of the manifest glory and rule of God be fully granted upon the earth.
1. Are you ready (and willing) to have God’s reign unhindered over the earth?
 2. You’re not ready for that until you desire it for your life right now.
 3. We tend to think that if God could only rule directly over the earth now then the rest of the world would get straightened out. We think of:
 - our neighbor
 - our spouse
 - our peers at work or at school
 - maybe people here at church
 4. But we need to be honest with ourselves at this point and ask “How would God’s visible, direct rule affect **me**?”
 - Am I rationalizing about something God would consider sin?
 - Do I desire to live under God’s rule now?

5. We need to get our lives right with God **now**. We need to live with God as our King (i.e. under his rule) **now!**

G. The last three petitions in Luke's version are personal requests.

1. "Give us sufficient bread for each day"—this is different from many translations because the original word is so hard to define exactly.
 - a) Background—people in Jesus' time were hired only a day at a time. (Liefeld)
 - b) It would have been important for them to trust God for sufficient food day by day.
 - c) E.g. 16:4—the people of Israel learned to trust God for manna each day.
 - d) We can trust God for our continual, daily provision.
 - e) We tend to want to "spiritualize" "bread". We may believe that God will provide for our physical needs but do we **live** like we do?
 - f) Matt. 6:31-33—"We are to ask God to provide us with food so that we need not be worried about it but can care about spiritual matters."
 - g) Most of us probably don't know what it is like to have to **trust** God for food. But we need to realize that the food that we do have has come from him.
 - h) Let's remember to **sincerely** (not merely mechanically out of habit) thank him for the food he gives us each day.
2. "Forgive us our sins..."—this is a confession that was meant to be repeated as needed (i.e. whenever one becomes aware of any sin). (Liefeld)
 - a) This petition is qualified by the phrase "even as we forgive those who do us wrong."
 - b) God can forgive us because we have forgiven those who have wronged us and maintain a continual readiness to forgive. (Marshall)
 - c) Since the one who is praying is a believer (he/she addressed God as Father earlier in the prayer) who has been justified and without guilt through the death of Christ:
 - (1) "The forgiveness he/she must extend to others is not the basis of his/her salvation but a prerequisite for daily fellowship with the Father." (1 John 1:5-10) (Liefeld)
 - (2) On the other hand, the person who does not forgive others may actually be revealing that he/she has not really known God's forgiveness.
 - (3) Or at least has not let the experience have its full impact in terms of understanding what it meant for God to be able to forgive **us**.
 - (4) Is there anybody that you need to forgive today? Don't think that God will forgive you if you are unwilling to forgive others...
3. "Lead us not into temptation."—better is "Do not allow us to fall into temptation."
 - a) Thus the thought is about God's permission which allows things to happen. (NIDNTT, vol. 3, pp.803)

- b) It is not a prayer to be preserved **from** temptation (James 1:13) but to be preserved **in** temptation.
- c) Do you feel like you don't have much power to withstand temptation when it comes your way?
- d) We need to pray **in advance** for the strength and the ability to not yield to temptation.

III. We should be **persistent** in prayer. (vs 5-8)

A. Jesus follows his model prayer with a parable intended to be an incentive to prayer.

B. Palestinian background: (Liefeld)

- 1. The whole family would sleep in the same room probably all on one mat.
- 2. The door would be shut and "locked" with a heavy bolt slid through two rings, one on the door and one on the door frame.
- 3. In desert areas journeys were often undertaken by night in order to avoid the heat of the day so this situation would not have been unusual.
- 4. In higher elevations (such as central Palestine and Lebanon) where it is cooler travel during the day would have been customary. This situation would have been unusual.
- 5. Either way, based on ancient Near Eastern hospitality a host would be expected to provide a welcome.

C. Typically, parables have but one point; let's follow the action through in order to find it.

- 1. Suppose you have a friend come to your house late at night after a long journey.
- 2. Just because you are surprised by the visit does not relieve you of your responsibility to provide a welcome. That would be an insult to your guest.
- 3. You do not have enough food and there are no Cub or Jewel stores open so you have to go to another friend's house to ask him for some.
- 4. It is late at night when you ask your friend through the door of his house for some food.
 - a) He responds: the door has already been shut; everyone is "in bed".
 - b) Not only is this request inconvenient for your friend but fulfilling it would require that he disturb his **whole** family in order to get over to the door and open it.
 - c) Vs. 8 says that the friend making the request gets the bread he needs not just on the basis of friendship but because of his persistence.

D. What is the main point of the parable then? Persistence in prayer.

- 1. Is God supposed to be represented by the friend who was reluctant to meet the request of his neighbor? No. That is not **the** point of the parable.
- 2. Why is persistence important in prayer? Isn't God eager to hear and to grant our prayers?

- a) Yes, but **sometimes** the answer (for reasons maybe only known to God) is not given immediately.
 - b) Also, sometimes the answer is, “Wait.” And what are you supposed to do while you are waiting?
 - c) If God’s answer is either not immediately given or is “Wait” the response that shows faith that God can and will answer is to keep on praying.
 - d) I.e. Persistent prayer is not just repeating prayers until God gets tired of hearing us; it is a commitment to trust God for the answer.
3. Do you just pray once or twice about something and then if no answer comes think that God isn’t going to answer you so you might as well stop praying about it?
 4. This parable teaches us that God **will** answer if we keep trusting in him and keep praying until he answers with either a “Yes” or a “No”.
 5. If you don’t have one already, a good way to keep track of how and when God answers your prayers is to keep a prayer notebook or diary.
 - a) Record what you pray about and when.
 - b) When God answers a prayer record how it was answered and when.
 - c) Record God’s answer even if it is “No.”
 - d) In this way you will be reminded to keep praying and trusting God concerning the items which you should still be expecting to hear an answer.
- E. This encouragement to pray because **God will answer** is continued in the next 2 verses.
1. “Ask”, “seek”, and “knock” are 3 “more or less synonymous expressions for prayer.” (Marshall)
 2. Verse 9 combines the element of persistence (“**keep** on asking”, etc.) with the element of assurance that God will answer (“it **shall** be given to you”, etc.).
 3. Verse 10 strongly emphasizes this assurance.
 4. With such strong words it makes me wonder why I don’t pray more! And when I do pray (unless there happens to be a crisis) I frequently do it not with an attitude of expectancy but with half-hearted duty.
 5. Are you like me? Maybe we find it difficult to believe that God **really** does answer prayer. Maybe we are too affected by a secular world-view.
 6. The prayer notebook can help us here too as we are able to look back at past answers to prayer and believe God for the future.
 7. Also, sharing answers to prayer with other members of the body can build up other people’s faith and be an encouragement for them to pray all the more.
- F. The last few verses dealt with the certainty that God will answer prayer; the next (and last!) 3 verses deal with the goodness of God’s answers.

IV. We should expect only good gifts from God (especially the Holy Spirit).

- A. Verses 11 and 12 are not talking about pets! What is involved is probably a request for food. (Fitzmyer)
 - 1. We would not think it right for a father to deceptively give his son something similar-looking to what was asked for and possibly harmful too.
 - 2. “The good that the son seeks will surely be given, without any deception.” (Fitzmyer)
 - 3. Verse 13 compares the expected good gift-giving of a human father (implied - who is evil compared to God) with the exceedingly good-gift giving of the heavenly Father.
 - 4. Our heavenly Father will provide all of the **good** things that we need if we trust him for them.
 - 5. Does that mean that God will give us everything that we ask for if we think that it would be for our good? No! As good human parents know when to say “No!” our heavenly Father knows even better!
 - 6. Most importantly, God will even give us the Holy Spirit (the supreme **good** gift) if we ask him.
- B. These verses “stress the need to ask God for what we need, and is a final summons to confident prayer” (Marshall) knowing that God gives **good** gifts.
- C. This then ties back into verse 3 and brings us full circle.

V. **Conclusion:** We’ve focused on a tightly packed passage this morning that contains a lot of teaching on prayer.

- A. We have seen that Jesus taught us how to pray by giving us a model to follow with thoughts that we should incorporate into our own prayers.
- B. We have seen that we need to be persistent in our praying. (This shows that we are dependent upon God and not upon ourselves.) Along with this we have seen that we can pray with assurance that God will answer our prayers.
- C. And, lastly, we have seen that we can **expect** God to be a giver of good gifts and especially the giver of the Holy Spirit to those who ask.
- D. As you go to pray today and in the coming days remember this passage and its teachings about prayer:
 - 1. Try to keep a notebook so that you will be more able to be persistent in prayer.
 - 2. You will be encouraged to pray more as you build a written record of how God has answered you and provided for your needs!
 - 3. Prayer is crucial to us as Christians because it is the outworking of an inward total dependence on God.
 - 4. Pray! God won’t disappoint you!

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