**Prayer that Pleases God**

April 26, 2015

Luke 11:1-13
Key Verse 11:13b “How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Almost all of our prayers begin by rushing into a series of requests in which we pour out to God our problems and our needs. This focuses our attention on what is troubling us and our inability to remedy it. Then we are more depressed and frustrated after we pray than before. Someone sums up how many feel even when they have prayed, “When we have finished our praying we can scarcely bring ourselves to believe that our feeble words will be heard, or that they can make a difference in the things which we have been praying. We have said our prayers but we have not prayed.” In today’s passage, Jesus gave the Lord’s Prayer in response to the disciple’s request, “Lord, teach us to pray.” The disciples were not known for their praying. They often watched Jesus pray but they didn’t enter into prayer themselves. In fact, while Jesus prayed, they slept. But at this time, they asked, “Lord, teach us to pray.” They realized that prayer is not only needed, but that they lacked in prayer. We also feel the same way. We know that prayer is important, but most of us fall far short. If we want to pray like Jesus prayed, let’s learn along with his disciples.

The Lord’s Prayer was not given to just be recited as a ritual. It is actually given to us as the Lord’s blueprint for prayer that is acceptable to God. Jesus says, “When you pray, say.” In other words, “Pray like this.” The Lord’s Prayer was given to show the disciples how to pray, not just the words they should use. Someone said, “The effective prayer is not measured by how loud you pray, or how long you pray, or even if you say the words of the Lord’s Prayer again and again in a repetitious fashion. Our prayer life will be effective if we are sincere and if we ask for the right things.” Look at verses 2-4. “Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.”

**First**, we have to pray on the basis of a new relationship. We have to start our prayer based on the fact that God is our Father. What Jesus is teaching here is pretty revolutionary. The word that Jesus used for Father was the common Aramaic word with which a child would address his father – the word “Abba.” Of course everyone used the word, but no one under any circumstances used it in connection with God. “Abba” meant something like “Daddy” but with a more reverent touch than we use it today. It meant something like, “Dearest Father.” Jesus transformed the relationship with God from one of a distant and unapproachable deity to that of a intimate relationship of a Father. The beginning of effective prayer is the recognition that God possesses a father’s heart, a father’s love, a father’s strength and a father’s concern for the best interest of his children. When we begin our prayer, “Our Father,” we begin to pray based on an intimate relationship with God – that of a father and child. God is not an angry judge looking for an opportunity to condemn us, nor is aloof and distant, too busy to hear you. He is our Father and can be approached on an intimate basis. Many of you have had bad experiences with your human fathers and formed wrong ideas about God. That is why it is very important to study the Bible to know who God really is.

**Second**, our prayer should not be self-seeking. Even though he is my loving Father and does meet my needs, my first petition should not be on my behalf, but on his. Praying, “hallowed by your name” is a safeguard against self-seeking prayer. God is holy, holy, holy. To “hallow” God’s name is to hold his matchless being in awe so that we will believe what he says and obey him. We have to guard against becoming shallow in our view of God. One way that we can “hallow” his name is by living a life of obedience before him. Martin Luther said that God’s name is made holy among us “when both our doctrines and our living are truly Christian.”

“Your kingdom come,” means that prayer is not asking God to do my will. It is bringing myself into conformity with his will. My prayers are too often filled with my kingdoms, my plans, and my causes. Can you imagine what would happen if we were preoccupied with the things of God? Just think about what would take place in the University of Toronto if we were determined to pray that God’s kingdom rule would make itself known in the lives of our neighbors and co-workers! To pray, “Your kingdom come” is to pray that God may rule in the hearts and lives of those who are lost. It is a prayer for salvation, for kingdom citizenship.

**Third**, we pray on the basis of new dependence. “Give us each day our daily bread” may at first glance seem irrelevant to most of us. Most of us have plenty to eat. Here the word bread is really a broad term meaning all of our physical needs. When we pray, “Give us each day our daily bread,” we are saying that we trust God as the source to supply all the physical needs of our lives, and we affirm that he will take care of everything we need. Notice that this trust in God for these needs is for each day. In the first century, bread had to be made on a daily basis. They couldn’t just buy a couple of loaves and put them in the freezer. Like manna that came once a day, God provides one day at a time.

We often get stressed out with anxiety because we try to face the problems of tomorrow today. Jesus said in Matthew 6:31-33, “So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or “What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” When we worry about tomorrow we are telling the heavenly father that we are not sure that he can provide for tomorrow’s bread. The invitation to pray “give us each day our daily bread,” is an invitation to come to God with even those things that others might call small. We are not just to bring the big things to God but even our ordinary request – for jobs, groceries, or even a car. If we don’t ask God to give us what we need every day we will gradually succumb to the delusion that we actually can provide for these needs ourselves. We can think that we handle this part and God only handles stuff that is serious. Here is the danger in thinking like this: pride can swell up within us and we can subtly pull away from trust in God.

**Fourth**, we need to ask God’s forgiveness and deliverance from the evil one. The next phrase of the prayer goes like this: “Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.” Forgiveness of sin is the greatest need of the human heart. Only God can grant us a pardon from punishment and guilt. There is one thing that troubles Christians more than anything else. It is guilt. We kick ourselves for our failures and punish ourselves relentlessly. Let’s pray this prayer, asking God to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Romans 8:1 declares that there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Let’s claim it and live without being paralyzed by guilt and shame. “And lead us not into temptation.” Here we are to ask God to keep us from falling into the power of trials and temptations. We are not strong enough to handle these on our own. Will God answer a prayer like this? 1 Corinthians 10:13 gives us a wonderful promise: “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

Now having given the disciples a pattern for prayer, Jesus teaches 3 principles of prayer through a parable.

**First**, we are to pray boldly (5-8). Look at verses 5-6. “Then he said to them, ‘Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, “Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.’” In order to understand this parable we need to understand a few things about first century culture. First of all, food was not as readily available as it is today. There were no 24 hour 7-11 convenience food stores. Secondly, hospitality was held in high regard and was seen almost as a duty. A visitor was welcomed and cared for, regardless of the hour of his arrival. In order to avoid the intense midday heat, people often traveled in the evening. A traveler arriving near midnight was not uncommon. Here is the dilemma. The poor unprepared host has a late arriving guest who is hungry after a long and exhausting journey and it is his duty as a host to provide a meal, but he has no bread. Not to provide for his guest’s needs would bring shame upon his family. So he goes to his friend’s house regardless of the lateness of the hour and to ask for his help. Jesus is asking each of his listeners, “Which of you has the nerve to wake up his friend in the middle of the night to ask for bread?” Jesus continues the story in verses 7-8, “Then the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything. I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.’”

The man inside the house initially refused the request; friendship alone was not a sufficient reason to upset the whole household. Ultimately, the reluctant friend got up and gave his neighbor what he needed, for one reason only, the persistence of the man making the request. Jesus is not comparing God to a sleepy, selfish and angry neighbor. He is not saying that God is annoyed by our persistent requests. He is contrasting the two; He is telling the disciples that if a neighbor can on the basis of boldness, be persuaded to meet the needs of a friend, how much more will your father in heaven meet the needs of his children.

Jesus is not saying that the reason for our failure in prayer is that we have not been persistent enough. We say to ourselves, “I know that if I had prayed more, more things would happen.” We have convinced ourselves that we must keep beating on God’s door until we overcome God’s unwillingness to act. Is that what verse 8 is teaching about prayer? Of course not! Here “boldness” in verse 8 is “shameless” in Greek. The man who was making a request was shameless in his persistence, continuing his pleading until his friend responded. But what gives us the right to come boldly or shamelessly to God with our needs? The writer of Hebrews reminds us that because our high priest Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven, we can “come boldly before the throne of grace” (Heb 4:16). We have no need to fear because we are children of the king. We are to pray boldly.

**Second**, we are to pray passionately (9-10). Look at verse 9. “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” Each of the three actions, asking, seeking and knocking occur in the present tense in the original Greek language. It thus literally means; “Keep Asking, Keep Seeking and Keep Knocking.” There is a progression in this persistence, asking, seeking and knocking; “asking means making a simple request. Seeking implies a stronger desire and a more definite kind of request. It implies a greater sense of urgency. Knocking shows determination to get an answer.” There are some situations that require more than merely asking for something. We need determination in some situation. By a continued practice of asking, seeking and knocking we break the habit where prayer is just an option, or is for emergency use only. A great example of persistence in prayer is seen in the life of George Muller, who was the founder of the great Christian orphanage work in England in the nineteenth century. He knew the importance of keeping at a prayer even when the answer seemed to be delayed. When he was young, he began to pray that two of his friends might be converted. He prayed for them every day for more than sixty years. One of the men was converted shortly before his death at what was probably the last service that Mueller held. The other was converted within a year of his death. We, too, need to pray and not give up.

**Third**, we are to pray expectantly (11-13). Because God is a loving heavenly father, he can be expected not only to answer our prayers, but in answer them in such a way that it is for our highest good. Look at verse 13. “If you then, through you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” We do the best we can to provide for our children, but sometimes our best is just not good enough. But our heavenly Father knows no such limits. God never says no because he is distracted, exhausted or irritable. Here I want to clarify briefly what it means to ask for the Holy Spirit. It does not mean that we do not have the Holy Spirit. The person of the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts. In Greek, it is without the article “the.” So it refers to the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit. We have to ask God to be filled with the Holy Spirit and be empowered by the Holy Spirit. God does not leave us trapped by our own limitation, but makes the Holy Spirit available to present our needs to the Father. Romans 8:26 explains this very well: “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”

God is eager to respond to his children who unashamedly ask, persistently seek and expectantly knock at his door with their needs and requests. So let’s come to God boldly.