

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
January 4, 2014

Lesson Text: Luke 11:1-13
Lesson Title: A Model for Prayer

Introduction

Have you ever heard the saying, “When all else fails, pray?” These words are a reflection of our selfish and proud disposition to do things our way and in our own strength. These words also express the reality that people for the most part only pray when everything they have tried fails.

Jesus did not live with a “When all else fails, pray” mentality. Prayer was a vital part of his earthly life and ministry as Luke recorded for us in his Gospel. Luke’s Gospel is the Gospel of prayer. Six times Luke specifically mentions Jesus as praying where Matthew, Mark and John do not mention it.

Jesus prayed at different times, for different reasons, and with a much different attitude than those around him. He prayed at His baptism (Luke 3:21) and when he choose His disciples (Luke 6:12). On more than one occasion he slipped away to be alone with the Father in prayer (Luke 5:16; 9:18). He also prayed with people around him (Luke 9:28-29). He prayed for individuals such as Simon (Luke 22:32). He prayed in the garden while waiting to be betrayed (Luke 22:40-44). He even prayed while on the cross (Luke 23:46). Jesus truly is our model for prayer.

Jesus’ teaching on prayer in Luke 11:1-13 is placed immediately after the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). Martha was pre-occupied with house chores and worried about serving the Lord during his visit to her home in Bethany. Mary, on the other hand, placed herself “...*at Jesus’ feet*” (Luke 10:39) which Jesus described as “...*that good part*” (Luke 10:42). Luke doesn’t tell us plainly, but it seems that story along with the disciples hearing Jesus pray was the launching pad for Jesus’ teaching his disciples about prayer.

The Disciple’s Request (Luke 11:1)

Verse 1

“And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”

“And it came to pass” is a transition phrase meaning “it happened.” We have no way of knowing how long after the visit to Mary and Martha’s home that Jesus’

disciples heard him praying. It is possible that they were near the garden of Gethsemane or somewhere in view of Jerusalem where Jesus frequently visited. There was “a certain place” where Jesus prayed and the disciples were obviously impressed with what they heard.

Luke tells us “when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.” The disciples patiently and kindly waited on Jesus to finish praying and then requested that he “teach” them how to pray. The disciple who made the request is unnamed.

The words “teach us” carries the thought of “help us learn now how to pray.” There is a sense of urgency in their request. Possibly their urgency came from the fact they had been listening to him pray and they knew that his praying greatly differed from theirs. The disciples are expressing their dissatisfaction with their own manner of praying.

“As John also taught his disciples” is interesting. These words make us wonder what John taught his disciples about prayer. Apparently what he taught his disciples was well known and impressive. According to Luke 5:33, even the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees were aware of how John taught his disciples to pray. It is evident that John the Baptist knew how to pray and those around him knew how to pray. Now, Christ disciples want to know themselves how to pray.

Note: Jesus’ disciples knew that John knew how to pray. Jesus’ disciples knew that John had taught his disciples how to pray. Jesus’ disciples knew that Jesus knew how to pray. Jesus’ disciples knew that they needed to know how to pray.

The Lord’s Response (Luke 11:2-4)

Verse 2

“And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.”

Jesus did not hesitate to respond to the disciple’s request. He said, “When ye pray, say...” and he then gave them a clear example of how they should approach God. Luke’s version of the model prayer is shorter than Matthew’s (Matthew 6:9-13). Most likely Jesus had spoken these words more than once. While Matthew’s account and Luke’s account may slightly differ, the same essentials are present.

First, *when you pray, always give reverence to God the Father.* True biblical praying does not begin by referring to God as “the man upstairs” or any other disrespectful approach. Prayer begins with recognition of “Our Father.” Prayer

is about relationship. The term “Father” is *pater* {pat-ayr} in the Greek. The title is one of intimate relationship and recognition of honor. It recognizes authority, but in the context of trust and love.

“Which art in heaven” speaks of where God the Father resides. Heaven is the real world. It is the place where God the Father dwells and where every believer saved by grace will one day be.

“Hallowed by thy name” means that as we pray we call upon God to make His own name holy in our life and in our world. God’s name is set apart from every other name in existence. God’s name is holy and consecrated. When we pray we should bless the name of the Lord (Psalm 103:1).

Second, *when you pray, always submit to God’s will in your world.* When you pray “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth” you are submitting to God’s authority and accepting His plan and purposes. You are looking forward to His “kingdom.” It would be like a citizen of a royal kingdom shouting, “Long live the king!” Prayer is about us aligning with God’s plans, not trying to get God to adjust to ours.

When you pray “Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth,” you are literally praying, “Lord, whatever is happening in your world, let it happen in my world.” The true child of God wants God’s will to be done, not our own. Our highest joy should be to do God’s will.

Verse 3

“Give us day by day our daily bread.”

Third, *when you pray, never be ashamed to ask God to meet your needs.* “Give us day by day our daily bread.” The model prayer quickly turns from the *heavenly* to the *earthly*. Verse 2 magnifies the Heavenly Father, His hallowed name, His kingdom, and His will. And now, Jesus talks about “our daily bread!”

While prayer should be about adoration, submission, and praise to God, it is also about “daily bread.” “Daily bread” would have reminded the disciples of how their forefathers were daily dependent upon the Lord for manna in the wilderness. Also, “bread” was literally a necessity in Jesus’ day and represented the basic needs of life. “Bread” symbolizes everything we need to survive. But why should we ask God for what we already have in such abundance?

When was the last time you asked God for a meal? Now don’t confuse that question with your blessing of thanks over your meal. Asking for a meal and thanking God for one are two different things. Are we just supposed to pray “Give us day by day our daily bread” when we are hungry? The answer is no.

Even with our cupboards full we should pray, “Give us day by day our daily bread.” Why? Because God is always the source of our physical well-being. He causes the earth to produce what we need and He gives us the ability to receive it. The psalmist said, “*For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills*” (Psalm 50:10).

Verse 4

“And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.”

Fourth, *when you pray, ask for forgiveness and deliverance from temptation.* Just as our bodies need physical food to survive, so our souls need spiritual strength and protection to survive the daily life. Receiving God’s forgiveness for our sins and forgiving others who have sinned against us is just as important as daily bread! In fact, it is more important.

“And forgive us our sins” stresses the importance of a right relationship between us and our heavenly Father. God’s children must ask for a cleansing of sin when we talk to the Lord in prayer. “For we also forgive every one that is indebted to us” connects our receiving forgiveness for our sins from the Father with our forgiveness of those who had sinned against us. This is emphasized not only here in the model prayer, but especially in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:35).

Without the daily discipline of forgiveness, we become bitter, judgmental, and eventually destructive to others and ourselves. It is impossible to pray biblically without forgiveness.

Question: Do you remember when the times the Lord has forgiven you? If so, then you remember the times you have forgiven others. And, if you haven’t forgiven others, the Lord has not forgiven you!

“And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil” stresses the need for our protection. This part of our Lord’s prayer troubles some people because it seems to imply that God might lead people into situations where they might sin. That is certainly not the case (James 1:13). “Lead us not” means “do not permit.” “Into temptation” means “to give in to whatever is tempting us.” The Greek word for “temptation” originally meant “a test that proved the character of something.” From there the word came to describe some situation where humans were being lured to doing something wrong. Simply stated, Jesus is teaching his disciples and us to ask God to help us avoid whatever would cause us to yield to temptation.

The Lord’s Stories (Luke 11:5-13)

Jesus often used examples of human behavior to illustrate the Lord's behavior to His children. His purpose in doing so was to magnify how the Lord treated His children in greater ways and with a deeper love. Such is the case in the two parables Jesus gave in connection with the model prayer.

The Story of the Persistent Friend (vv.5-11)

The first story Jesus tells the disciples presents a situation that would be familiar to those in biblical times. Public accommodations were limited or in some cases no existent in those days. It would not be a strange thing for a "friend" to arrive and seek a place for rest or food while traveling.

Verse 5-6

"And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?"

"You," in this verse represents the disciples. The first "friend" represents the disciple's neighbor to whom the disciples would go to ask for bread for their unexpected "friend of mine" who has come unexpectedly at mid-night and needs to be fed.

Jesus places the disciples in the role of petitioner in this story. They are the host in need of bread which obviously represents the disciple seeking something from God.

Verse 7

"And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee."

"Trouble me not" would be like saying, "That is your problem, not mine." The reasons given by this neighbor as to why he won't open his door were good reasons. It's late, the children are in bed, and the doors are already shut for the night. But the message of this story goes deeper than that. This reluctant neighbor is a picture of the way people often imagine God. They see him as stingy, distracted by His own desires, and reluctant to release blessings He obviously has to give. The prophet Habakkuk felt this way when he appealed to God to do something about the rampant evil in his day and it seemed God would do nothing (Habakkuk 1:2, 13). The Psalmist expresses similar feelings in his conclusion that God was unresponsive and unconcerned (Psalm 73).

Verse 8

“I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.”

As Jesus continues this story he clarifies one important detail. The neighbor said, “I cannot rise and give thee” (v.8). Jesus said, “He will not rise and give him.” Our Lord’s point is where the selfish neighbor would not do what was right for the sake of his relationship with his friend, he finally agreed to get up and “give him” what he needed. Because the petitioning friend was persistent, or kept asking, the neighbor finally gave.

The host, or the one who went to his neighbor asking for bread at mid-night didn’t care that his neighbor had chosen to respond poorly to his request. His need outweighed his neighbor’s selfish reasons for not getting up and giving him bread. So, he kept asking.

Is Jesus teaching his disciples that prayer is the overcoming of God’s reluctance to give? Absolutely not! Jesus is teaching them three basic truths in verse 8. One, God will never withhold anything from His children when we are doing righteously. The host, or the one making the petition in this story was trying to do what was right to give a traveler bread. Don’t ever be afraid to ask God for what you need when your motive is righteous. Second, God’s child should never be ashamed to come to God boldly (Hebrew 4:16; 10:19). This “importunity” or persistence of the host is not arrogance or beating down the neighbor’s door. It is a knowledge that he is at the right place petitioning one who can help. Third, if persistence caused this sinful neighbor to open his door at mid-night and give what he had, how much more can we trust a holy God to answer our prayers!

Verse 9-10

“And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”

Just in case the disciples missed the point, Jesus summarized the story in verses 9-10. The word “and” is the connection between the story and Jesus’ summary. Here is the summary:

First, if you will “ask” the Lord, then your request will “be given.” Jesus is teaching the disciples and us that if we are persistent in our request and pure in our motives the Lord will answer (James 4:2).

To “ask” is to request. It means we are simple, plain, and direct with our Lord. How difficult we make such a simple process.

Second, if you “seek” the Lord, then you will “find” that for which you seek. The word “seek” emphasizes desire, earnestness, and intensity.

Third, if you “knock,” then the Lord will “open” the door to your request. To “knock” indicates that you want the Lord to know you are there and that there is a purpose for your being before him in prayer.

“For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” kind of stacks all these words together to make a powerful point. Jesus is saying, “Keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking.” The host in the story just kept on asking, seeking, and knocking and his neighbor finally opened the door and gave him bread. God will do that and more for those who seek him in prayer.

The Story of the Caring Father (vv.11-13)

Verse 11-13

“If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”

After giving his disciples a story about a reluctant neighbor, Jesus now gives his disciples a story about a caring earthly father to illustrate the goodness and graciousness of God. He even made this story more powerful and personal by using words that caused his listeners to imagine that it was their children who were asking them from the basic necessities of life.

Don't lose the point of this story by trying to spiritualize the “stone” and the “serpent.” Jesus' use of these particular things are designed to make the story real thereby helping us connect with our Lord's point. And his point is simple. A loving “father” would never give a rock to his son if he had asked for a piece of “bread.” A loving “father” would never give a snake or scorpion to his child if he asked for meat to eat. A father who would do such things would be cruel indeed. An earthly father, although he is “evil,” or sinful and selfish by nature, would never do such terrible things. On the contrary, our heavenly Father delights to give the best to His children. That is Jesus' point in this story.

In this particular text, Jesus said, “How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” When Jesus says the Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him, he is not teaching that believers must pray to receive the Holy Spirit after they are saved. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit comes to live within and indwell the believer at the moment of salvation (Romans 8:9). Since the Holy Spirit was promised, Jesus is saying that whenever we pray, God always honors His promises!

Conclusion

If we are going to experience all that our relationship to Christ offers, we cannot neglect prayer. And if we are going to pray we must pray in the manner in which our Lord teaches in the model prayer.

None of us have a perfect prayer life. Prayer will always be an area of needed growth and improvement for the child of God. While Jesus taught many wonderful and needful truths about praying, he never taught that we had to be perfect to pray. But he did teach us to pray.

As you grow in your prayer life, always count on God to answer your prayer. If your requests are righteous and your motives are pure, don't give up. Keep praying. As you grow in your prayer life, don't be hesitant or reluctant to ask God to supply your needs. The Bible does not teach that you can march into the throne room and demand things. However, it does teach that you can enter God's presence with boldness and know that He will give you what your heart desires. His answer may be yes. His answer may be no. But he will always honor your confidence in His ability to meet your needs.

“Lord, teach us to pray.”

Amen.