

Importuning in Prayer

***“He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”
—Luke 18:1***

LUKE RECORDS TWO PAR-ables of Jesus which emphasize the importance of importunity—that is, perseverance—in prayer. In the first of these parables, recorded in chapter 11:5-10, the Lord describes a man who makes a request for bread to a “friend.” In the second parable, found in chapter 18:1-8, a widow asks an “unjust judge” to avenge her of an adversary. Luke suggests that the main lesson of the latter parable, as stated in our opening scripture, is that his footstep followers should continually take advantage of the benefits derived from prayer, and not to “faint” from that privilege. Indeed, this lesson is contained in both parables.

This is a beautiful and important teaching from the Master. It serves as a reminder to us that, as consecrated believers, we are in continuous need of divine grace and assistance. We are confronted with many temptations, difficulties, obstacles, discouragements, and other potentially unhappy situations. Apart from God’s overruling providences in our

lives, and his willingness and ability to help us in our every time of need, we would be sure to “faint” by the wayside and perhaps even drop out of the ranks of those who serve the Lord.

In the dedicated lives of those striving to serve God during the present age, prayer can make the difference between fainting and continuing courageously on in the narrow way. Therefore, as Luke indicates, when the various difficult situations of life confront us, instead of fainting, we should pray. Additionally, such experiences when rightly appreciated provide us with the assurance that prayers offered in great times of need will be heard and answered. The Lord’s answer may seem to be delayed, but this is no reason to refrain from earnestly seeking what would be his will for us.

MODEL FOR PRAYER

The parable in the 11th chapter, in which one petitions for bread from a friend, immediately follows what is often referred to as “The Lord’s Prayer.” Jesus provided this outline to his disciples in response to their request, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.” (vs. 1) In this model prayer we are reminded of the importance of proper reverence in approaching the throne of heavenly grace—“Hallowed be thy name.” We are also to remember to pray for God’s kingdom, which is the divine arrangement for the blessing of all the families of the earth. Our Heavenly Father wants us to be interested in others—all whom he has promised to bless, and for whom Christ died.—vs. 2

We are to ask for our daily bread, keeping in mind that our spiritual needs are by far the most

important. We are also to seek the forgiveness of our sins, and in connection with the prayer are reminded that the Lord's favorable answer to petitions along this line depends upon our willingness to forgive those who trespass against us.—vss. 3,4

GIVING THE PARABLE

Jesus followed his outline of prayer with the parable, saying: "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? 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. 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. 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."—vss. 5-10

Here, unmistakably, the lesson is perseverance in prayer. James wrote of those who ask, and receive not, because they "ask amiss." (James 4:3) This point, however, is not involved in the parables under consideration. Jesus had just provided the outline of his model prayer, and in the parable, as he stresses the importance of continuing to ask in order to receive the blessings which we need, he is speaking of the things which the Heavenly Father is pleased to give us, and which are in harmony with the model just given.

Prayer is communion with God, and Jesus would have us remember that we need this communion. Hence, we should not suppose that the blessings he is pleased to give us need be requested only once at the beginning of our Christian life, or even at the beginning of each day. Think of the request, "Thy kingdom come." How many times this petition has gone up to our Heavenly Father since the beginning of the Gospel Age! Indeed, this prayer is still in the hearts and on the lips of God's consecrated people. Although his will is not yet being done in earth as it is in heaven, it is still very proper to continue to pray earnestly for that kingdom to come.

In the morning when we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," we cannot expect that this petition will suffice for weeks to come. We may find it appropriate to repeat this request even before the day is over. The Lord knows what our daily needs are, but he wants us to realize those needs, especially those of a spiritual nature. We are to become more and more conscious of our source of supply by the habit of praying often for those things which our Heavenly Father has promised to provide for our spiritual growth and development.

THE FATHER'S CARE

Immediately following the parable Jesus raises the question, "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? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 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?"—Luke 11:11-13

This is an encouraging lesson, and evidently based upon the parable. In the parable, the man of whom bread is requested displays a measure of indifference, in that he does not wish to inconvenience himself to get up in the night and give bread to a friend who requests it, and is in need. This is not a wicked man. It is just that his own comfort seems more important than his friend's need. However, even this man, "being evil" or imperfect, though he is, does finally bestir himself to answer his friend's repeated petition.

"How much more," Jesus said, "shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Our Heavenly Father is not moved in any sense by self interest, nor is he indifferent. He is wholly unselfish, and is interested only in that which is the very best for his consecrated children. We can never go to God in prayer at a time that is inopportune to him. He never sleeps; he is never weary. If it seems that he does not grant our petitions immediately, it is because in his wisdom he knows that a delay is best for us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, and he wants us the more earnestly to seek the blessings which he has promised.

In this lesson, the Holy Spirit is referred to especially as being a needed gift from God. Perhaps, by using this example, Jesus is reminding us that all our needs as New Creatures are of a spiritual sort. They encompass blessings which come to us through the Word of God and our understanding of the precious truths of his divine plan, which are revealed to us through his Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul speaks of the love of God being “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.” (Rom. 5:5) This means that if we have the Holy Spirit we have the love of God filling and blessing our lives. God’s love is manifested in providing for all our needs, and we can always be sure that those needs will be supplied, according to the “abundance of grace” in Christ Jesus our Lord.—vs. 17

SECOND PARABLE—ADVERSARIES AVENGED

The parable of the importunate widow also emphasizes the need of continuance and perseverance in prayer. It reads: “There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?”—Luke 18:2-7

Here the petition of the widow is not presented to a friend, as in the first parable, but to a “judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man.” If the “friend” of the first parable could be spoken of as “evil,” certainly this judge could be considered more so. Thus the contrast is the greater, in that if such a judge would grant the widow’s request because of her importuning, how much more would the Heavenly Father grant the requests of his faithful people whom he loves and for whom he has promised to care.

That which was sought by the widow is somewhat different from the bread requested in the former parable. She wished to be avenged of her adversary. Like the widow, the true followers of the Master live in a hostile world where Satan, the Devil, is the prince. Jesus warned his disciples that in the world they would have tribulation, but encouraged them by saying, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."—John 16:33

Because of the blinding influences of Satan, our great Adversary, many in the world may be unkind and unjust to those who are following in the footsteps of the Master. However, it is not for us to retaliate or seek to punish them. This is to be left in the hands of the Lord. Jesus is our great example along this line. Peter wrote of Jesus that he was one "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself [his cause] to him that judgeth righteously."—I Pet. 2:23

From the standpoint of our limited perspective of time in the divine plan, it could well seem, apart from faith, that God is doing little or nothing about the sufferings of his people in this present evil world. Throughout the age they have been praying for deliverance, and yet the great Adversary is still able to stir up opposition. They are still reviled, persecuted, and spoken evil of falsely. (Matt. 5:11) However, the Lord wants us to continue praying that our adversaries will be avenged by him, in his own due time and way. As individuals, the saints throughout the age have continued thus to pray, but have finished their course in death without seeing their prayers answered.

In Revelation 6:9,10 we are given a general picture which reminds us of this. Here those who faithfully

laid down their lives giving testimony to the Truth are represented as crying out from “under the altar.” They say, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” These, without doubt, even before they completed their course in death, still petitioned the Lord for the establishment of his kingdom, and through its agencies subdue all the powers of evil. This petition continues even today.

The concluding words of the second parable of our lesson are in keeping with this. Jesus said, “I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8) This indicates that the full answer to the petition of the “widow” class to be avenged takes place at the end of the age, when the Lord returns for the purpose of bringing to an end this “present evil world” and establishing his kingdom. For many of the saints this has seemed to be a long wait for the answer to prayer.

Even now, when our Lord is present and engaged in work preparatory to the establishment of his Messianic kingdom, we still must wait. We are still not to revile those who revile us, nor in any way to seek our own vengeance against them. It is still true that vengeance belongs only to God, and that we are to wait for his due time to vindicate himself and his people.—Deut. 32:35; Ps. 94:1; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30

Thus, as Jesus indicated in our opening Scripture, we are to continue praying, and not to faint, regardless of how unfriendly the world may be. Let us continually look to the Lord, praying for his kingdom to come, and for his will to be done in his own due time and way. ■