

August 4, 2013

Parables: Prayer

By Bryan Hodge

“Ere you left your room this morning, did you think to pray? In the name of Christ our Savior, did you sue for loving favor as a shield today?

When you met with great temptation, did you think to pray? By His dying love and merit, did you claim the Holy Spirit as your guide and stay?

When your heart was filled with anger, did you think to pray? Did you plead for grace my brother, that you might forgive another who had crossed your way?

When sore trials came upon you, did you think to pray? When your soul was bowed in sorrow, Balm of Gilead did you borrow at the gates of day?

~Mrs. M.A. Kidder

Let us consider four parables that we will classify as “prayer” parables. Let us notice...

A Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5-8)

The setting (Luke 11:1): Jesus had been praying. Prayer was a normal, frequent, and important part of his life (Luke 3:21; 6:12; 9:18; 9:28; 11:1; 22:41; 22:44). The disciples wanted to learn how to pray. Jesus, then, provided them with a model prayer (Luke 11:3-4).

The parable (Luke 11:5-8): Jesus tells a story of a friend who comes to your house at midnight. Your children are asleep in bed with you. If you get up you likely will wake the whole house. You want him to go away. However, he does not. He keeps on knocking and calling out to you. What does he want? He wants three loaves of bread. Finally, you decide to arise and give him what he wants so that you and your house can have some peace.

Neil Lightfoot provided this picture, “In Palestine the majority of the people were poor and most of the houses were one-room cottages. The houses were built on the ground, with beaten clay serving as the floor. The animals were usually kept inside to protect them against weather and possible theft. In a part of the house, a platform was raised above the floor on stilts. It was in this upper story where the family cooked, and ate, and slept together. Quite naturally then, the man did not want to get out of bed because it would disturb the whole household” (The Parables of Jesus, Part 1, p. 64).

The application: Some have suggested that this teaches persistence in prayer. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with persistence (Luke 6:12; Matthew 26:44). However, I do not think that this is the point. I do not think that this is intended to teach that God has to be worn down, or that He is inconvenienced or disturbed when we pray. Read Isaiah 65:24.

The meaning is found in contrast. On one hand, there is a man who is inconvenienced by his friend. On the other hand, there is God who is not inconvenienced by us. He stands ready to respond. Moreover, He does not answer to get rid of us. He invites us to ask, seek, and knock (Luke 11:9-10).

A Father's Response (Luke 11:11-13)

The setting (Luke 11:1): same as the first.

The parable (Luke 11:11-13): If your son asked for the necessities of life, if he asked for food (bread, fish, egg) would you give something cruel or even harmful (stone, serpent, scorpion)? Note – each of these have a similar appearance. A stone can resemble a loaf of bread, a serpent can resemble a fish, and a rolled up scorpion can resemble an egg.

The application: God cares about us. The parallel account reads, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him (Matthew 7:11). He will give us what we need.

The Unjust Judge (Luke 18:8)

The Setting (Luke 18:1): The audience is the disciples (cf. Luke 17:22A). The purpose of the parable is stated, “Men always ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1 cf. Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

The parable (Luke 18:2-8): A Judge who does not fear God or regard man finally gives into a widow's plea for justice. He says, “Because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.”

The Application: Some have suggested that this teaches the need for persistence in prayer. However, let us ask: Is God a God that must be wearied before answering? Is He one who has no regard for man? Is God troubled by our requests?

The meaning is that prayer is not to be neglected. If an unjust Judge, without regard for man, can be prompted to respond, how much more your living Father, who cares for you? It is a lesson from contrast.

The Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9-14)

The setting (Luke 18:9): This parable concerns those who approach God in a self-righteous manner, and despise others.

The Parable (Luke 18:10-14): Two men are pictured in the temple praying. The Pharisee boasted of his good deeds and religion. He also compared himself to others. How much better he was in his mind than others. The Publican (tax-collector) knew his shortcomings. He compared himself to no one. This was between him and God, and involved no other. He said, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!”

The Application: Jesus said, “I tell you this man (the publican) went down to his house justified rather than the other (the Pharisee): for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:14). Don't boast to God. He knows you. Don't compare yourself with others. They are not the standard. Be humble. Acknowledge your sins and ask for mercy, when needed. “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (Proverbs 3:34; James 5:6). “Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7).