

The Parables of Jesus

- The Persistent Friend at Midnight

(Luke 11:5-10)

This parable is found only in the Gospel of Luke. As we prepare to discuss this parable, I would like to remind all of us that it is important that we do not take this parable, or any other parable, out of its full context in which Jesus was using it.

The starting point in truly understanding our parable is found in Luke 11:1. The disciples came to Jesus and asked Him, *"Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."* Jesus' disciples must have heard or seen that John the Baptist "taught" his followers "how to pray." This query may also have come from some of Jesus' disciples who once were disciples of John the Baptist. (John 1:37-40) Jesus' disciples felt that it was their time to learn how to correctly pray from Jesus. They must have noticed something different in the way Jesus prayed to the Father. It wasn't the typical prayer that others prayed, though those people and their prayers were not bad. However, they saw something different about Jesus' prayer life. This obviously got their attention and they wanted to know the "secret" of His successful, but yet different, prayer life.

Our parable is used as part of Jesus' response to the disciples concerning "teaching them to pray." His full response is found in Luke 11:2-13. In order to get the full understanding of why Jesus used this parable and what He was trying to teach His disciples, we MUST put it within its full context within Jesus' response and teaching. The first part of His response to their question is found in Luke 11:2-4 in which Jesus proceeded to give them an example of the "characteristics" of true prayer.

Luke 11:2-4 - *"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. Give us day by day our daily bread. 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."* It was just after giving this example of prayer to His disciples that He continues His teaching on prayer by using our parable.

The Parable of the Persistent Friend at Midnight - Luke 11:5-10 - *"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? 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."*

As we continue our discussion on this parable, let's first look at the "characters" in the parable. If we get a good understanding of these "characters," I believe, we will get a better understanding of what Jesus was telling His disciples concerning His success in His prayer life with the Father.

- The first "character" we meet is a "man" in his home who is a "friend" of the one coming asking to "lend" him "three loaves." This "friend" was sleeping in bed with his family.
- The second "character" is the "friend" of the man who was at home with His family, sleeping. This second man was having guests come to his own home and was out of bread.
- The next "character" is the "bread." Notice that the request was explicitly given for "three loaves" of bread.
- The last "character" is the actual "friend" who the petition for the "three loaves" was actually asked for.

The "traditional" view of this parable puts forth that the man who was sleeping at home with his family represents God, the Father and that the man who comes to the door is representative of any one of God's people coming to Him with their need. The "traditional" view puts forth that it was because of the second man's "importunity" or "persistence" that the first man got out of his bed and gave the second man what He needed.

The "traditional" view concludes that this is the same for us today as God's people. We are taught that if we are persistent enough, God will answer our need. We are taught that if we are "really, really serious," then we need to be "really, really persistent" in telling God what we want so that He will be forced to do what we want and ask. We are taught that in doing so it will cause a begrudging God to move on our behalf because of our persistence. We are taught that, through our persistence, we can tell and force a "sovereign God" to do what we want Him to do. Hmmm.....

I would like to put forth my thoughts and "difficulty" with this "traditional view." The first difficulty I have is that the first man is "asleep" in bed with his family. If this man is to be representative of God, the Father, then Jesus would be contradicting what His own Word tells us about our God. Psalm 121:3,4 tells us, "*He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keeps thee **will not slumber**. Behold, he that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.*"

This "traditional view" also reminds me of Elijah in his encounter with the prophets of Baal in 1Kings 18:25-29. Elijah told the prophets of Baal to "...*Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure **he sleepeth**, and must be awaked.*" It may be that Baal sleeps but not Yahweh - He sleeps not!!!

The second difficulty I have with this "traditional view" is that the first man will not get up even though the second man is his "friend," but he will only get up because of his "friend's importunity (persistence). This again is contrary to Jesus' own teaching.

In John 15:13-15 - "*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his **friends**. **Ye are my friends**, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knows not what his lord doeth: but **I have called you friends**; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.*" Jesus was willing to lay down His life for His "friends" even though his friends did not persist or beg Him to do it. He did it out of love and compassion for His "friends."

We must also be aware of the fact that the usage of the term "friend" in Jewish culture at that time was a term which meant being in some type of "covenant" with the person you called your "friend." Therefore, the term "friend" was considered a "covenant term." Notice, that Jesus uses the term "friend" for each of the individuals in our parable. Jesus was using a term that represented that there was a covenant relationship between these individuals. If this is true then something is amiss here!!!

Is this who our God is? First of all is He one who is sleeping? Is He one who would only answer our prayers if we bang on the door of His throne room and cry out loud enough and long enough? Is He one who does not care about those He calls His "friends," those that He is in covenant with? To me it does not make sense that the first man would be representative of God, the Father or of Jesus. In fact it would seem as if this first man was actually the opposite of the nature and character of God, the Father.

Could it be that this was what Jesus was using this parable to portray concerning prayer? Was He teaching His disciples to stop having a wrong picture about who their God is? Could Jesus be telling them, as well as us today, that this is **not** what our God is like and that we do not have to keep "banging on the door" to "wake Him from His sleep" to help us in our time of need. Hmmm.....

We must always keep in mind that it is not what we do but rather it is all about **who He is!!** The attitude of our heart as we approach this holy and loving Father, God is not about what or how **we** do things, but rather about **who He is**, as well as **His will** and **His ways**. As believers and disciples of Jesus we now have access to Him through the blood of Jesus. We come before Him knowing that we have the right to be there as His son or daughter because of, and through, the Blood of Jesus. Hebrews 4:16 tells us, *“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”*

We must remember that we are not to approach a Holy God as some "bratty kid" who thinks he or she can boss their Father, God around and force Him to do what we want. The scripture tells us that we are to “storm the gates of hell” but it doesn’t say anything about “storming the gates of heaven.” We might not say or think that we are doing this, but sometimes our actions may be portraying this. Many times we are often taught that this is the way we are to pray and petition our God. Could it be that we may be approaching the Father with a faulty concept of who He is? Hmmmm.....

In this parable we need to also see that the request was for “three loaves.” Nothing in scripture is “just there” by coincidence without any apparent reason, purpose or significance. Therefore, Jesus must have had something in mind when He specifically mentions “three loaves.” The number “three” biblically represents divine wholeness, completeness and perfection. Obviously, the “loaves” represent bread which is always symbolically used to represent the “manna” of God – His Word. The use of the term “three loaves” therefore points to the divine, wholeness, completeness and perfection of God’s Word, His ways and His precepts. All of which express the true character and nature of the Living God.

The person who is bringing the request for the “three loaves” does represent an individual who would come to their God with their petitions. However, as we have seen, they may be God’s people but unfortunately, they do not really know their God to whom they are petitioning and praying to. They have a faulty view of who their God really is. The intention was well placed but they had a faulty view of their God which needed to be corrected.

Another thing that I believe Jesus was trying to express to His disciples was what the correct attitude of heart should be when bringing our petitions before the Father. In our parable, Jesus showed His disciples that our prayers and requests are not necessarily to be for ourselves but they are to be for others. The man was asking for food so that he could feed his “friend.” This expresses a correct attitude of heart concerning the man asking for the three loaves. His heart was not a selfish one but one that should be “loving others” and placing their needs first. This should be the correct attitude of heart for us as Jesus’ disciples, today.

Therefore, as we have seen, this parable was expressing two things. One is that we need to have a correct attitude towards the Father as we bring our petitions to Him. The second is what the correct attitude of the petitioner’s heart should be. It is to be about others and their needs. Most importantly, however, it is about giving others “bread,” the Word of God – whether in speaking and giving others the Word of God or by “giving” the Word of God to others through our actions towards them.

As I mentioned in the opening of our discussion, we need to take this parable in the full context and teaching to Jesus’ disciples in which it was given. Remember, His disciples had asked Him to teach them to pray the way He prayed to His Father. To do this we must go further in this time of Jesus’ teaching.

Let's look at what Jesus goes on to say. *“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. 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 11:9-13 (KJV)

Here we seem to get a whole different picture of our God. Jesus is teaching His disciples what the true character and nature of our God. Jesus is revealing to us how we are to approach our *loving* Heavenly Father in prayer and what His response will be. He is not one who is sleeping and needs to be prodded into hearing us and being forced into answering our petitions. Let's briefly discuss what Jesus is teaching His disciples concerning their God.

Jesus first teaches them, "*Ask - it will be given...*" The word "ask" used here is the Greek word, "*aiteō*" which does mean to "to ask, beg, call for, crave, desire, require." Jesus does not tell us not to ask for what is needed either for ourselves or others. What Jesus does teach is that we are to come with a correct attitude of heart who truly knows who our Father, God truly is. Jesus is telling His disciples that there is no need to continually "bang" on the doors of the "Throne Room of God" because God is not asleep or that He cannot be bothered with us. The opposite is true. Notice, He tells us to simply "ask," with the correct attitude of heart, and "*it will be given you...*" Matthew 6:8, tells us, "*...for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.*"

He then teaches them, "*Seek and you will find...*" The word "seek" used here is the Greek word, "*zēteō*" which means to crave after and desire. We are to seek after God and we will find what we actually are in need of. Matthew 6:33 is appropriate here - "*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*" The attitude of our heart should be that of one who seeks after and desires what **God wants and desires** in every situation - **not what we want**. If we seek with this correct attitude of heart concerning who our God really is, we will find what we are looking for which will ultimately be what God knows is best for us in any and all situations because He is God.

Jesus continues with, "*Knock and it shall be opened unto you...*" The word "knock" used here is the Greek word "*krouō*" which has a very, very, deep, deep meaning. It means....to knock. However, it does not infer a banging or knocking the door down. Simply a "knock" on the door of God's heart, a heart that loves His children and is always available and "open" to them.

Notice that Jesus repeats this phrase about "asking..., seeking... and knocking." In Jewish thinking, when something is repeated it is inferring not just a double importance but an "exponential" importance. In other words it would mean something to the 10x10th power = 100 times in importance to grasp whatever principle was just spoken twice. Therefore, as Jesus used this phrasing 3 times in this same teaching, it would be as if he said, ask..., seek... and knock to the 100th power. It would mean that it would as if he said it 1000 times. That is how important this phrase and this concept would be for His disciples to grasp concerning prayer.

As we can see, Jesus is putting across a whole different picture of who our God is and how He can be approached by His people than what they were used to and even taught by the religious leadership. The Jewish people at that time had a "picture" of God as a task master and hard to get to. It was put across by the religious leaders of the day that God could only be approached through formality and through begging and pleading and that this could be accomplished only by and through a select few – the religious leaders. They made it seem as though God was not watching over or caring for them at all times. He may even be asleep.

In their own thinking, why else would they be in this horrible situation with the Romans? It never occurred to the religious leaders or the people themselves that their difficulties with the Romans may have possibly been caused by their sin as well as their incorrect view of who their God really was.

This was the "picture" portrayed of by the "first man" in our parable. This is what the Jewish people's idea of God, concerning hearing their prayers, was. Jesus was trying to correct their incorrect view of their Heavenly Father. Jesus was telling His disciples that their view of God had been tainted over the course of time and their attitude of heart towards God, concerning prayer, needed to change.

Could we also possibly be having our vision "impaired" by an incorrect attitude of heart toward our Father, God? Can we be thinking, without realizing it, that we need to "bang" on Heaven's door to "wake up" our God so that He will hear us and answer our petitions?

Jesus then concludes with an analogy that fully expresses who our Father, God is really like. He is ***not like the first man in the parable*** He had just told them. Rather, that He is a "loving Father" who would only want and give the best to His "sons." He teaches them in Luke 11:11-13, *"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? 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?"*

Notice, that Jesus uses the same commodity as in the parable - bread. It is the same commodity that Jesus used in his example of prayer, *"Give us this day our daily bread..."* Bread, as well as fish and eggs, were considered life-sustaining commodities.

The scriptures tell us that God's people will never be forsaken nor their children beg for bread. Psalm 37:25 tells us, *"I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.")* Will a loving Heavenly Father cause us to "beg for bread" when that would be contrary to His own Word and to His own nature?

The key to this whole exchange between Jesus and His disciples and the use of the parable we are discussing is found in Luke 11:13. He explains it for us in saying that if you, as a natural, human, father would know what is right concerning their own "son's" needs, ***"how much more"*** does God not only know how to meet the need, but He ***desires and will*** meet the need of those He calls His sons and daughters..

How will He meet our needs? If we notice, we see a difference in relationship expressed here by Jesus then in our parable. The disciples, and anyone else who is a disciple of Jesus, would no longer be looked upon just as "friends," but rather they would now be considered ***"sons"*** of the Father, just as Jesus is the "Son of God." As the Father sent the Holy Spirit to rest upon and within Jesus to empower Him to go forward in His ministry and relationship with the Father (Luke 3:21,22), so will the Father send and give His Holy Spirit to those who call upon Him. *"How much more would the heavenly Father, give the Holy Spirit..."* Why would Jesus say this? He said it because just as He walked in the Spirit of God as the Son of God, so are we now, through Jesus considered a child of God whose spirit would now dwell within.

In this teaching, Jesus gave the answer to the disciples' inquiry to "teach them to pray." They asked Him because they saw the difference and effectiveness of His prayer life. Jesus' answer was not "rocket science." His answer was all about understanding and grasping the correct concept of **relationship** with the Father. His answer was not about the fancy ways of praying or the "ninety nine steps to effective prayer," etc. It was simply about **relationship**.

The key in praying effectively, as Jesus prayed, is to be found, first, in truly knowing the character and nature of our loving and benevolent Father, and secondly, with the "Holy Spirit," whom the Father gives to His children to lead them in their prayer life. The Holy Spirit will show us and direct us in what we need and ought to bring before the Father.

As mentioned previously, Jesus did give His disciples an example of a basic simple prayer. (Luke 11:2-4) If we notice in the example that Jesus gave, we never see the word “I” used. We see the words “our” and “us.” These are plural forms. It reveals the attitude of heart in prayer for all of God’s people. It leaves out the selfish “me, mine and I” types of prayer. Hmmm....

As we come to the Father, we must come with an attitude of heart that wants and desires what **His will** desires. We are called to speak forth **His Word** so that it accomplishes what **He wills**, what **He wants** and what **He desires**, not what we think should take place. As His sons and daughters we are to make **His will** and **His desires** become our will and our desires - not the other way around. (Isaiah 55:6-13)

It is vital for us to understand and know without a shadow of a doubt that our God is a loving, Heavenly Father who delights and welcomes His children anytime they come to Him. Actually, if we really think about it, as we pray in this understanding our pray time becomes an act of worship. We are acknowledging and turning towards our God for who He is as the source of our life. This is what true worship is in a nutshell. They that worship must worship Him in this truth and yield to the leading of His Holy Spirit. (John 4:24)

Through our parable and His teaching, Jesus teaches His disciples to break from their “traditional” views and enter into a true understanding of who their loving Heaven Father truly is. This is how Jesus prayed. There is no need to wake Him up because He never is asleep. There is no need to beg and “bend His arm” as we petition Him. No, our Father loves us as we come to Him and ask, seek and knock in the true understanding of our relationship with Him. We must remember what Luke 11:13 tells us, *“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?”*