

Sunday August 13, 2010

Disciple's Prayer

Luke 11: 1-13

As many of you know, we are studying spiritual disciplines in our Sunday school time. These include such godly practices as prayer, reading the Bible, meditation, fasting, corporate worship...and the like. We practice these things not because they gain us any credit or merit in God's eye, but because when God regenerates us, He writes His law on our hearts; and He begins to grow in us a desire to seek Him, to commune with Him, to truly know Him and to be like Him.

In 2 Cor 3:18 Paul says: "*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*"

That is what the disciplines help to do in us...by communing with Him, we are "...*beholding the glory of the Lord*" with our spiritual eyes and are gradually...oh so gradually...painfully slowly...being changed to be like Him. This is what we really want, isn't it? So, YES – the disciplines are our duty, but they are also our privilege....a wonderful privilege that has been procured for us by Jesus....this astonishing privilege of knowing God.

To Timothy, Paul wrote: "...*train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.*"

So when we bow our hearts & minds before Him in prayer, when we spend time in His word, meditating on it...pondering it...thinking about it...when we come to church and gather with the rest of His family we're in training for godliness.the old KJV says, "*Exercise thyself unto godliness.*"

It's like going to Gold's Gym only better....we're going to God's Gym...
Its godly exercise...godly training.

This morning Jeremy taught us about Bible reading. Last week, I started discussing prayer and promised that this morning's sermon would be a continuation of that general topic. I'd like to do that by looking at Luke 11, verses 1 to 13. **[READ & PRAY]**

This is another example in Luke's gospel of Jesus praying. Luke often tells us how Jesus went off by himself, or went in to the mountains or went to 'desolate places' to pray. He sometimes spent the entire night in prayer....but I love the way this begins: "...*one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray..."*"

That encourages me.

It lets me know that I am not the only one that feels somewhat inadequate about my prayers. I guess, if we went around this room and we were all very truthful about our prayers...about how infrequently we pray...and just the "quality" of our prayers...I suppose we would find the results very unsatisfying.

By nature, we do not know how to pray. It's okay to need to be taught. It's okay to have to learn to pray. It's okay to try...and maybe not do so well...and then try again. The word disciple and the word discipline come from the same root.... A disciple is a "disciplined one"...a student, so to speak. It's somehow encouraging to me to know that I am not alone in my need to be taught to pray.

So...that's what we want too: BTW, when a disciple brings a request to Jesus, what is that? IT'S A PRAYER, RIGHT?

Lord, teach us to pray. Teach us how to pray, teach us what to pray, but also....teach us to pray.

Lord, give us hearts that desires to pray...make us men of prayer and women of prayer...a people who love our time alone with you

I know there is a sense win which every child of God cries "Abba, Father"....but just doing a quick study of praying & prayers in the NT shows me there is still much that eludes me.

I know there is mystery here....prayer is not an academic subject that is naturally comprehended. **It is a spiritual exercise.** Consider this: you communicate with the sovereign creator of the universe in prayer. The giver of life...eternal....unchanging....all mighty. Consider also that in His death, Jesus has secured for us all the benefits of salvation - including this exquisite privilege of coming to God in prayer...to the point that Peter tells us to "...cast all our anxieties upon Him because He cares for us."

Remarkable!

Ok...to the text: some of that mystery is unpacked in Jesus' first word: **Father**. It is the way Jesus addressed God and it the way he would have us address Him as well. We have been given the spirit of adoption by which we have a gracious, God-given right to say, "**Father.**"

Remember at the end of John's gospel when Jesus first appears to Mary Magdalene that resurrection Sunday morning near the grave site...? He sends a message to his disciples through her...he says, "...go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

I hope that thrills you. I hope it fills you with thanksgiving.

"*Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.*"

I suppose we're all more familiar with Matthew's version of this prayer...Luke seems to give us an abbreviated version. As you know Matthew reads: "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*"

The point is that Jesus gives us a model prayer...the actual words don't need to be memorized and repeated – although I don't see any harm in that – but more important than the words are the themes...what are Jesus' priorities?

“...hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.”

I don't think anyone uses the word “hallow” anymore....the closest we get is Halloween. It simply means to regard something as “separate” or “holy”....and we refer to His name, we are referring to His personhood; to who He truly is.

So we pray that His name may be sanctified among us...that He may be honored by all that He may be our treasure and precious to us. We are instructed to call Him “Father”, which allows us an intimacy....but there is a holy fear and holy reverence there as well.

The Greek word “kingdom” is *basilica*...and it primarily has to do with the rule or government of God. Matthew hits the nail on the head when he records the words: “*your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*”

Now please don't ‘tar & feather’ me when I say this, but in a real sense, it has to do with God's law....you know that God's law is His revealed will...His desires.

We typically speak of God's law in its ability to give us an awareness of our sin and its ability to condemn us....but that's not the entire story, is it?

When Jeremiah says, "*Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*"

Certainly, God writing His law on our hearts is a good thing.

David wrote: “*The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;*”

So when we pray “your kingdom come” – certainly - in one sense we are praying for that great day when Jesus returns to earth – and make no mistake...that day is coming. But in another sense we are praying that the Father's desires may become our desires, my family's desires...my church's desires.

Do you see that these first two items are requests? May I honor & treasure the Father....and may His will be my will. Neither of these requests can be accomplished through human effort....they are completely beyond our ability...they both require God to act.

Again: it is not so much the words as the themes that are important. At its root, prayer is God-centered. Certainly, the very nature of prayer acknowledged that God is sovereign....God is loving....and God is almighty.

“Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.”

The first personal request is for God’s daily provision.
The prayer acknowledges that God is provider ... He is Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord who provides.

You should notice that all these requests are in the first person plural. Part of that may be that the prayer could be used as a corporate prayer, but the main reason is that we are a community of believers....a family.... So I pray that God makes provision for me each day, and for you. I tend to emphasize the singular aspect because I know that what we all need, we each need individually.

Matt 6 says “.... *do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*”

This isn’t a command to be foolhardy, but it is a command not to be overly anxious and worry about what may happen tomorrow or next week or next month. Pray about your needs today...just like during the wilderness journey, the Israelites were provide the enough manna for their needs each morning....but not enough to hoard.

It’s strange, but I think sometimes God has given us ‘TIME’ in these 24-hour doses because that’s what we need, and that’s what we can handle.

“..forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.”

Notice how the word ‘sins’ and the word “debt” are used interchangeably....and how closely tied our being forgiven is with us being a forgiving people.

This is the root problem, isn’t it? We need our sins forgiven.
Its not low self-esteem, it’s not a disease, not our short-comings or our failure; it’s sin.

If you’re listening to me at all this morning, and you’re thinking of someone else’s sin,
stop it right now!

But...if you have a deep sense of your own sin...of your own indebtedness to God...an amount that is far beyond your ability to ever repay, then believe this also: there is a savior named Jesus who suffered the punishment for your sin. He paid the debt he did not

owe. He paid the debt for all those who come to him. All who come have their sins forgiven because they have been paid for.

And if that is the case with you – and I hope that it is – if you live in a glass house like that crowd around the adulterous woman in John 8 – why are you picking up stones?

A forgiven person should be a forgiving person.

Remember the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18? A master forgives a huge debt one of his servants has. And then this servant goes out and refuses to forgive someone who owes him a much smaller sum...? When the master learns of it, he says to the unforgiving servant: "...*should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?*" And he is thrown into jail.

Then **Jesus clearly warns** us: "*So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.*"

Look, this is not a theological treatise on how to get saved. We know that the gospel tells us to turn away from our sin and believe in Jesus...that his death was a sacrifice made on our behalf. The emphasis here is on how our being forgiven is demonstrated: "...*should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?*"

The prayer ends with the request: "*And lead us not into temptation.*"

A couple quick general observations: the word 'temptation' may refer to either trials or enticements to sin. Whenever I see any kind of ambiguity in scripture, I assume it is intended to be ambiguous.

Therefore, the request is for God to keep us from any affliction that would make us succumb and slip away from the faith and to keep us from pride and lust and bitterness that would so ensnare us that we might renounce the faith.

Now I know you're a theologically-minded group, so you may be asking, "Does Dyba think it's possible for someone who is truly saved to slip away and be lost?"

And the answer is: No...but I also think that one of the ways God makes sure that doesn't happen is by prayer.

And this isn't the only time Jesus encourages us to pray this way, is it?

The example that jumps to my mind is that in all three of the synoptics, when Jesus is going into Gethsemane, he leaves his disciples behind and tells them: "*Watch! And pray that you don't enter into temptation.*"

It is a request that reflects our ongoing need and our ongoing dependence on God Paul to the Corinthians: "*Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he*

will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

Our passage has two other short sections that supplement the disciple’s prayer: verses 5, 6, 7, & 8 are a short parable that gives us a wonderful promise about prayer and verses 9 - 13 make that promise crystal clear.

The parable is a little unusual from our 21st century, American viewpoint...and – structurally – verses 5, 6, & 7 are one long interrogative....it’s a question. **[READ vs 5 -8]**

Ok...you get the scene. In that culture, the traveler shows up at the host’s home and the host has nothing to feed him...although it would have been his social obligation to do so.

So he has the *audacity* to go to his neighbor and wake him up...and now it becomes his obligation to provide for them. This very likely was a one-room dwelling and the whole family was asleep on one mat.

Our understanding of the parable really turns on what we take this word that the ESV translates “*impudence*” to mean. The NIV has “*boldness*” which is really what ‘impudence’ meansthough maybe not as offensive. KJV has ‘*importunity*’ which means to make urgent & repeated requests. NASB has “*persistence*” (& the ESV footnote says it could mean that)...but I have to think there’s a little more than that here...as the other translations indicate. Jesus does give a clear parable in Luke 18 that we should always persist in prayer and “...*never lose heart.*”

BTW...the point of this parable is NOT a comparison between God and this neighbor who’s already in bed; they are actually being contrasted with each other...as verse 13 shows.

The point of this parable is that the disciple – you and I – should be like this empty-handed host. YES...we should persist in prayer....But also, we need to have the boldness, the confidence to come to God like a child comes to his father...knowing he’s going to fix it...whatever form that may take.

Look...you folks know I am not one of those “name it & claim it” guys. A pox on that heresy!!

But – I’ll say one thing: I do not think that our expectations of prayer should be shaped by our own shallow experience with prayer....our expectations of prayer should be shaped by the word of God...by the promises of God.

And what a thrilling promise this is: “*I tell you....because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.*”

I say this to the needy among you.

Heb 4....”*Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*”

Heb 10:....”*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith...*”

Confidence. Full assurance.

Let’s let these things shape our expectations in prayer. [READ vs. 9 -13]

Asking – seeking – knocking...I know some people see distinctions, but they all seem to be basically saying the same thing...and he repeats each of the three in different words. So – in 2 verses he gives **essentially the same promise 6 times!!**

All these verbs are in the present imperative indicating that we should ask, seek, & knock continually. The point of the two verses isn’t that we always get exactly what we think is best, but rather that we get what is truly best....and – by that - God is glorified.

Like Mike told us from John 11 last week: there’s no need to draw God a road map...let’s just lay our requests before a loving Father who is able & willing to do what is best.

And BTW....**however** He answers - **be thankful**.

In the last two verses, Jesus intensifies the picture from a neighbor to a father.

In the same way the sleeping neighbor is contrasted with God, here earthly fathers are contrasted with the heavenly Father....using the “how much more” argument. If something is true in this little instance, “how much more” is it true in the larger case!

“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

We know from Hebrews that God rewards those who seek Him...He rewards them with what they seek: He Himself.

The Holy Spirit is no one else but God himself. The promise is for His presence....and in His presence there is fullness of joy.

Amen.