

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 10th Sunday After Pentecost, July 24, 2016

Will God Answer Your Prayer?

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July 24, 2016

Luke 11:1-13

Our scripture reading from Luke is really two messages, not one. Jesus prayed often and his prayers were directed to his Father, God, and in the first four verses of Luke 11 he teaches the disciples, and us, how to pray. The prayer he teaches is the same prayer that we pray every Sunday, the Lord's Prayer.

Jesus was praying and the disciples, seeing him praying, asked him to teach them how to pray. He responded offering a prayer in three petitions, the first petition being to address God in an intimate manner as Abba, or Father in English, and to honor him. According to the Zondervan Commentary ⁽¹⁾, "hallowed be your name, your kingdom come" "... *points both to God's ultimate victory at the establishment of his kingdom but also to the present as God's people 'hallow' his name through righteous living. 'Your name' [in the prayer] was a Jewish expression for 'you' and [was] a way of avoiding the holy name of God*" which Jews would never speak. In synagogues then and now a prayer called the Qaddish is recited after the rabbi's sermon which addresses God in the same manner.

The second petition in the Lord's Prayer is for sustenance, "our daily bread" and the reference to "daily" harkens back to the manna the Israelites received each day in the desert during the Exodus.

The third petition is for forgiveness and avoidance of temptation. In this context, the word "temptation" can be misleading. God does not tempt us, but sin does, and that is what the prayer asks, that we will not be tempted by sin.

This then is how Jesus taught us to pray. We pray our God in an intimate manner which honors him, we pray for the necessities of life, and we pray for avoidance of sin's temptations.

Note that we aren't taught to pray for our druthers, things we want but can do without. For most of my life I have wanted a Mercedes Benz 300SL gull wing roadster. I even have a scale model of one on my desk but somehow or other God has not seen fit

to give one to me. I don't need it and certainly can't afford it but I want it. But praying for it will never work. We are only to pray for what we truly need and, unfortunately I don't need that Mercedes, and I don't think it is on God's priority list.

I do get a kick out of athletes and coaches who go into a huddle before a sports event to pray for victory. That is not prayer, it is nonsense. Carolina prays for victory over Duke. Duke prays for victory over Carolina. And on and on. God isn't going to pay attention to such prayers. Among other things, they are selfish and self-serving. They certainly are not prayers for the necessities of life and they are not prayers to honor God.

The remaining nine verses of our scripture reading are a parable which addresses hospitality and asking for what you need, not what you want.

In the parable a traveler has arrived at a home seeking shelter at around midnight. In Biblical times people had an almost sacred duty to provide hospitality. The homeowner did not have food to provide to his guest, so he went and banged on his neighbor's door asking for bread.

Recognize that back then people left their door open all day and did not close it unless they were sleeping and wanted privacy. You simply didn't knock on a closed door unless it was an emergency. But not being able to show proper hospitality was an emergency in that culture.

Picture the neighbor's house. It would probably have had only a single room and one tiny window. The floor would have been packed dirt and part of the floor would have a raised platform with a charcoal stove which was kept burning all night for warmth. The family would have slept on mats around the stove and the mats would have been close together for warmth.

Any livestock --- chickens, goats, lambs, etc. --- would also be in the house at night.

For the neighbor to get up to answer the knock on the door would disturb the entire family, not to mention the livestock.

In the parable, the neighbor does eventually arise and provides what was requested, if for no other reason than that he would be shamed if he did not offer help regarding hospitality. In the community he would be talked about if he did not respond to the plea. It was far better to awaken the family and disturb the animals than to be

reproached by the villagers if he refused the request.

The point of the parable is that if our friends answer our appeals, even if unwillingly, how much more will God respond to our appeals to him who desires to give us his kingdom.

Jesus is teaching the disciples and us how to pray and he “... *instructs us to ask for whatever we need, to knock expectantly, and to pray like someone banging on the door.*” (These Days, March 7, 2016)

James Brashler ⁽²⁾ said, “*The message of the parable is that a shameless request in order to provide hospitality and responding to a neighbor’s need even when it is inconvenient demonstrates the kind of shameless praying Jesus commands ...*

“If sinful human parents will give their children the good things they ask for rather than giving them dangerous things, Jesus continues, certainly God the Father will go far beyond the responses of human parents by giving the Holy Spirit.”

But in your prayers, remember that God is the sole judge of what we truly need. He won’t pay much attention to your druthers, to my Mercedes Benz 300SL, or to Carolina or Duke Basketball.

Amen.

1. Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, Volume 1, Clinton E. Arnold, ed., Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002.
2. James A. Brashler, in Presbyterian Outlook, Vol. 196, No. 26, Dec. 22, 2014.