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LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY.

– *MARCH. 15. – Luke 11:1-13. –*

Golden Text. – "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you." – Luke 11:9.

THE first suggestion of this lesson is the inquiry, Why did the disciples ask the Lord to teach them how to pray? were not the Jews a praying people, and were not the prayers of the righteous acceptable to God from the beginning of the world? Yes, the Jews were a praying people, and their prayers, when devout and sincere, and in harmony with the expressed will of God, were acceptable, and were answered. So also were the prayers of others before the Jewish age began. Adam communed with God in Eden until sin separated him from God and he was cast out of Paradise. After he had sinned, he heard and promptly recognized the voice of God as he and Eve walked in the cool of the day. They feared the voice then because they had sinned, but their prompt recognition of it indicated that it was familiar to them, and that often before they had delighted to hear it.

The first act of God's mercy after the penalty had been pronounced, and the promise had been given of a coming deliverer – "the seed of the woman" – was to clothe each of the penitent pair with a garment of skins, provided by a sacrifice, which prefigured the sacrificed "Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." We confidently say the penitent pair, because had they been rebellious and defiant, instead of penitent, God could not have dealt thus mercifully and kindly with them. He would not have forced them to wear the typical robe, nor have rewarded [R1945 : page 46] them with the hope of a future deliverance. Evidently they still had faith in God, and repented that they had hearkened to the voice of the tempter and forfeited the divine favor by disobedience; and they were anxious to find some way of return to that favor, since God in his mercy had given

them a ray of hope which lifted them out of the slough of despair; and they desired, if possible, to have some recognition, some way of access to God, to reassure their hearts from time to time that they were not cast off forever. Such reassurance of hope for the race was given in the institution of the typical sacrifices, which began in the clothing of Adam and Eve in the skin of the sacrificed animal, the robe thus provided typifying the imputed righteousness of the sacrificed Lamb of God, Christ Jesus.

So we find those descendants of Adam who had respect to the will and promise of God offering to God acceptable typical sacrifices in harmony with his arrangement, thereby expressing both their faith in the promise, and their desire for full harmony and communion. Thus Abel and Seth and all the godly ancients sacrificed; and through these typical sacrifices they approached God, they walked with God, and had the evidence in their own hearts that they pleased God, as it is written, – "By faith Abel offered... sacrifice...by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts. By faith, Enoch, ...before his translation had this testimony, that he pleased God. By faith, Noah...became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." – Heb. 11:5-8.

Thus there was a typical justification and way of access to God open to faithful individuals long before the law of Moses instituted the typical *national sacrifices*, which brought that people, *as a nation*, near to God and secured a measure of his temporal favor to them, which, in turn, were also typical of the greater favors to come by and by, when the typical sacrifices should give place to the antitypical sacrifice, the real sin-offering which takes away the sin of the world, which the blood of bulls and goats could only prefigure, but could never accomplish.

With the typical adoption by God of Abraham's family and the institution by the law of Moses of the typical national sacrifices, the privileges of approach to God through these, and of communion with

him, was systematically taught by the law and the prophets. Consequently, in the nation of Israel we have multiplied instances of earnest and believing prayer; and instances, too, thank God, of the gracious hearing and answering of their prayers. And not only so, but some of the believing Gentiles, seeing what God had wrought in Israel, believed on him, and also caught the spirit of prayer; and, though unjustified even typically by the typical sacrifices, their prayers were heard, and God kept them in remembrance until the time appointed for his favor to turn to the Gentiles.

Of this class were Cornelius and his friends (Acts 10). Of Cornelius it is said that he was a "devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway." And when the time arrived, when, consistently with his plan, God could answer the prayers of Cornelius, he did so, saying, "Cornelius, ...Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God;" and shortly after the great blessing came in abundant measure. Praise the Lord! "A bruised reed he will not break, and smoking flax he will not quench." Wherever there is a humble, contrite, faithful heart, God's love takes cognizance of it, and in his own good time and way confers his blessing. If their prayers cannot be immediately answered, they are not forgotten, but are kept as memorials until the right time comes for their answer.

Therefore it was not because the disciples had never been taught to pray to God, that they inquired of Jesus as to the acceptable way; but, perceiving his intimate communion with God, and that God always promptly heard and answered him, they evidently felt that there must be something in his manner of approach to God which secured such prompt recognition and answers, and they would know the secret of his power. The secret of his power with God was in the fact of his full and complete harmony with the will of God; and this likewise is the secret of power among all of God's people. True, we, being imperfect, cannot say, as did he, "I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29); but, realizing our imperfection, we can come with humble confessions

of our shortcomings and with faith in his love and mercy to be exercised toward us in his own appointed way. And then we are acceptable in the beloved One.

Jesus taught us how to pray by a simple illustration which shows (1) The proper reverential attitude of the believer toward God, – "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." (2) A full acquiescence in, and perfect accord with, the will of God for the blessing of the whole world through the coming Kingdom of Christ, which is also a recognition of the preparatory redemptive work by his sacrificial death – "Thy Kingdom come." (3) The earnest desire that the will of God may be done in earth as it is done in heaven. (4) An expression of our dependence upon God for the supply of our daily needs, with an acknowledgement that we do not need luxuries, but will be content with the "bread and water" assured through the Prophet. This may also be considered a petition for the bread of life for our spiritual sustenance – "Give us this day our daily bread." (5) Request for forgiveness of sins in his own appointed way (through Christ), at the same time impressing upon ourselves the necessity for exercising toward others the same spirit of forgiveness, and stating that we have thus forgiven all our debtors – "Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy." (6) Earnest desire for his assistance in the hour of temptation or trial, that we may not be overcome by it, and thus led to sin and thus brought under the power of the Evil One – "Abandon us not in temptation [or trial], but deliver us from evil." This implies a determination to resist sin, as well as a leaning upon God for assistance. Such must be the attitude of the soul in every approach toward God in prayer. **[R1946 : page 46]**

Verses 5-13 are blessed assurances of our Heavenly Father's love and solicitude for us, which should fill our hearts with the deepest gratitude and responsive love, and which should strengthen our faith and our earnest desire to come often to his footstool and tarry long in his presence, assured that if we come in the frame of mind indicated by our blessed Lord, we shall never be turned away empty; "for *every*

one that asketh [thus], receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." And the thing received will be neither harmful nor useless. It will not be a stone for bread, nor a serpent for a fish, nor a scorpion for an egg; but it will be something good and wholesome; for the Lord "knows how to give *good gifts* unto his children." Christian, we need not tell you this: you have proved it well. And yet, praise the Lord! we have not exhausted his bountiful grace. "Still there's more to follow." "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you." "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." The thing we need most, for which our Father is most pleased to have us seek and pray, is the spirit of his holiness. – Verse 13.
