

[R3351 : page 117]

"PRAY WITHOUT CEASING"

– LUKE 11:1-13. – MAY 1. –

Golden Text: – "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find."

WE ARE NOT to suppose that the disciples had never prayed up to the time mentioned in this lesson, when they asked the Lord to instruct them in the matter. On the contrary, we are to suppose that they had, in common with the Jews in general, and in harmony with our Lord's example, been accustomed to go to God in prayer. They seem to have realized that, as our Lord's teachings were considerably different from those of the Scribes and Pharisees on various points, so also his conception of prayer was probably different, and they desired to have instruction on this subject along the lines of his advanced teaching. Several instances are recorded in which our Lord Jesus prayed in the presence and in the hearing of his disciples – a sufficient number to preserve us from the error of some who claim that public prayer is improper. Nevertheless, apparently our Lord's usual method was to go to the Father privately, after the manner he described to his disciples when he said, Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father in secret.

The spirit of this injunction was carried out by our Lord when he withdrew from his disciples into a mountain alone for prayer, and we have several records [R3351 : page 118] of his spending a considerable portion of the night thus in communion with the heavenly Father. One lesson to us from our Lord's example would be that if he in his perfection needed to have spiritual fellowship and communion with the Father in order to carry on the assigned work, we, his disciples, imperfect according to the flesh, and every way lacking the wisdom, etc., which he possessed, have much more need to look continually to the Lord for the guidance and comfort, the sustenance needed in all the trials and difficulties of life in the narrow

way. It is in accord with this that the Apostle exhorts, "Pray without ceasing, – in everything giving thanks."

THE SECRET OF A HAPPY DAY.

We do not understand the Apostle to mean that the Lord's people are to be continually upon their knees, but rather that their hearts are to be constantly in an attitude of prayer, mentally, spiritually, looking to the Lord for guidance in all the affairs of life, and to see that their conduct has the divine approval. This thought of perpetual communion with the Lord, continually looking to him for his smile, continually watching that no earth-born cloud arise and hide from us the Father's face and blessing, is the attitude of the advanced Christian. To such an one every day and every hour is a time of fellowship with the Lord. Whenever business cares, household worries, etc., interfere with such communion it is an evidence that we are being overcharged with the cares of this life, and the difficulty should be corrected: either we should rectify matters by diminishing our business responsibilities, etc., or, if this be impossible, we should counterbalance the cares of life with the more earnest and more repeated turning of our hearts to the Lord for guidance in even the trivial affairs of life, much more in the great ones.

It was probably on our Lord's return to his disciples from such a season of private fellowship with God that they asked him respecting prayer, as recorded in our lesson. Had he been much in the habit of praying with them audibly we may presume that they would have known to take his style of praying as proper copy for their own.

The account of this prayer, as given by Luke, differs considerably from the account given by Matthew, the latter, apparently, being much the more complete statement (Matt. 6:9). We are not to understand that our Lord meant, Say ye, but rather, as it is elsewhere given, After this manner pray ye. In other words, our Lord gave, not the words for our prayers, but a general sample of style.

We incline to think that our Lord's followers have, to a considerable degree, neglected the style, and, instead of the brief, orderly petition, all seem inclined to adopt more or less of the mannerism which our Lord ascribed to the improper prayer; namely, vain repetitions, as though it were expected that the prayer would be accepted only if it were of certain length. We [R3352 : page 118] are not to suppose that our Lord spent hours in prayer, and yet used so brief a form as the one here given to the Apostles, but we may reasonably expect that the order which he here set forth would be the one which he observed, namely – (1) The address,

"OUR FATHER, WHICH ART IN HEAVEN."

The term, Our Father, would necessarily be a new one to the Jews, for they were a house of servants. By this the apostles were to understand that, having become identified with the Lord Jesus, they were now privileged to consider themselves sons of God, and he their Father. Perhaps that was one of the particular points on which they desired instruction. They may have heard the Lord Jesus addressing God as his father, and may have wondered whether or not they would be so privileged to address him. This prayer would assure them that God recognized them, not as servants merely, but as sons. This is in accord with the statement made by the Apostle John (John 1:12), "To so many as received him, to them gave he the privilege to become sons of God." The term is one of special endearment.

The affection of a true father for his child, being one of the most precious in the world, is used to illustrate the relationship of the Lord's consecrated members to the Creator. It is necessary to be some time in the school of Christ as disciples, learners, before we are able properly to appreciate the meaning of this word Father as applied to God, but the more we come to know of the love of God, which passes all understanding, and the more we are enabled to draw near to him through faith and obedience, the more precious will this term Father become.

(2) "HALLOWED BE THY NAME."

This expresses adoration, appreciation of divine goodness and greatness, and a corresponding reverence. In addressing our petition to the Lord our first thought is to be, not a selfish one respecting ourselves, nor a thought respecting the interests of others precious to us, but God is to be first in all of our thoughts and aims and calculations. We are to pray for nothing that would not be in accord with the honor of our heavenly Father's name; we are to wish for nothing for ourselves, or for our dear ones, that he would not fully approve and commission us to pray for. Perhaps no quality of heart is in greater danger of being blotted out amongst professing Christians today than this thought of reverence for God. However much we have grown in knowledge, and however much we have gotten free from superstitions and errors, and however advanced in some respects is the Christian's position of today over that of a century ago, we fear that reverence has been losing ground, not only in the nominal church, but with many **[R3352 : page 119]** of the members of the one "Church of the living God, whose names are written in heaven." Every loss of reverence is a distinct disadvantage, both to the Church and to the world, paving the way to various evils, and ultimately to anarchy.

The difficulty is that ignorance and superstition were the foundation for much of the reverence of the past, and, as the light of Truth dispels the error, only the few receive the precious Truth instead of the error, and real reverence of love instead of reverence of superstition and fear – and even with these the transition sometimes involves loss of considerable reverence. The Lord's people will do well to cultivate this quality, and they will be helped so to do by following the order of prayer which our Lord has here laid down – considering first the will and honor of God as superior to their own and every other interest.

(3) "THY KINGDOM COME."

As God and his glory and honor are to be first in the minds of his children, so their next thought should be for the glorious Kingdom, which he has promised shall bless the world. However much our own personal interests and affairs may be pressing upon us, and however much we may desire to have the Lord's blessing and guidance in them, they are not to outrank our appreciation of his beneficent arrangements which he has so clearly promised in his Word. We are to remember that the Kingdom, when it shall come, will be a panacea for every ill and every trouble, not only for us, but for the whole world of mankind. We are not, therefore, to permit our own personal needs to be too prominent, but are to remember that the whole creation is groaning and travailing in pain together, waiting for this glorious Kingdom and the blessing upon all the families of the earth, which our heavenly Father has promised shall yet come through the seed of Abraham.

This thought respecting the Kingdom, its necessity, and the blessings that it will bring will keep prominently before our minds our own high calling to joint-heirship with our Lord in this Kingdom. And in proportion as that hope is clearly before our minds it will be, as the Apostle explains, as "an anchor to our souls, sure and steadfast, entering into that which is within the vail." This anchorage of hope in the future, in the Kingdom, will enable us to pass safely, and with comparative quiet, through the trials and storms and difficulties of this present evil world. More than this, our thoughts respecting the Kingdom will remind us that if we are to be heirs of the Kingdom it will be necessary that we have the appropriate discipline and training. And so, while praying, Thy Kingdom come, our hearts will naturally think next of the fact that our hopes are that when the Kingdom comes we shall be participators, with our dear Redeemer, in its glory, and in its great work of blessing the world. And in proper order then will come the thought that we must now have the necessary trials, difficulties and disciplines to properly fit and

prepare us for the duties of the Kingdom. This thought in turn will make all the afflictions and trials of this present time seem to us light afflictions, knowing that they are working out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Thus the very offering of this prayer in its proper order will bring us a measure of relief from our perplexities, trials and disappointments before, in their proper order, we reach these to mention them at the throne of grace.

(4) "THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH, AS IT IS DONE IN HEAVEN."

This petition offered from the heart implies that the one offering it has made a full consecration of his will, his heart, to the Lord, and that as he hopes for the Kingdom by and by to come and subdue all unrighteousness and to establish the divine will from sea to sea, and from pole to pole, so now, the petitioner being thus in accord with the Lord's will, and thus wishing that it might be universally in control, will see to it that this will is ruling in his own heart – that in his own affairs God's will is done to the best of his ability in his earthly condition, even as he hopes to have it perfected in the Kingdom. No one can intelligently and honestly offer this petition and not desire and endeavor to have the Lord's will done in himself while on earth. Thus a blessing comes to the one who offers this petition before he has asked any special blessing upon himself or others. The mere thought of the divine arrangement brings a blessing, a peace, a rest, a sanctification of heart.

(5) "GIVE US DAY BY DAY OUR DAILY BREAD."

Matthew's statement is, we think, preferable on this point also: "Give us this day our daily bread." The thought seems to be that of continual dependence upon the Lord, day by day, for the things needed – accepting for each day the Lord's providential care and direction of our affairs. Daily bread should here be understood in the broad sense of food and raiment – things necessary. The Lord's people, who recognize him as their Father, must trust him as children,

while seeking to use the various instrumentalities and opportunities within their reach. They are to provide the things necessary for themselves, yet to recognize the divine provision and care which has pre-arranged matters so as to make their present conditions and blessings attainable. Agnosticism and higher criticism in general may deny, if they please, divine providence in connection with the grains and other supplies for man's necessities; but the eye of faith sees behind these supplies the love of God, and the wisdom of God, and the power of God, making ready for man's necessities, and [R3352 : page 120] giving the things necessary in such a manner as will be for the advantage of mankind – through sweat of face, etc.

The petition does not warrant us in asking for particular kinds of food and delicacies. Whether our energies and carefulness in respect to life's affairs shall result in temporal prosperity, accompanied with the comforts and some of the luxuries of life, or whether we shall barely have sufficient, and that with unceasing toil, we are to leave to the Lord's providence to direct. The Scriptures admonish us that we are not to be avaricious, but, while "not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord," we are to "be content with such things" as divine providence may grant us.

The child of God on common fare and in common clothing may really be much happier than are some much more prospered in temporal matters. His contentment with inferior conditions arises, not from a less ambitious mind, but rather from his faith and hope and love, which, under the guidance of the Lord's Word, discern that the present life is merely a vestibule to eternity, and in realizing that the Lord is supervising the affairs of his people. So the trials, persecutions, discouragements and disadvantages in the present time will work in them and work out for them preparation of heart, development of character, which will make them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

(6) "FORGIVE US OUR SINS."

Those who come to God in prayer acceptably must approach him with a realization of their own insufficiency and unworthiness: they must realize that they [R3353 : page 120] are by nature sinners, and that their flesh is both fallen and weak ("so that they cannot do the things which they would"). Not the Adamic sin, but personal transgressions are here referred to, for Adamic sin, unrepented of and unforgiven, would stand as a barrier so that the supplicant would have no right to go to God in prayer at all until he had thus repented and been forgiven through the merit of the Mediator. He would have no right whatever to call God his Father, but would still be one of the Adamic race – unregenerated. Our coming to God in prayer and calling him Father imply that we have accepted the mediation of the great Redeemer, through the merit of his sacrifice – imply that our sins have been forgiven, that we have been covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness, and that the Lord is no longer dealing with us as sinners.

What sins, then, have we to confess? We reply that all should recognize that their very best efforts in the flesh necessarily come short of perfection – short of the glory of God. Although the forgiveness of sins is not here mentioned as being through the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ, yet other Scriptures clearly show us that this is the only ground of our fellowship with God, – that there is no other name given under heaven or amongst men whereby we must be saved from our sins.

To petition the Lord for forgiveness of sins implies that we are at heart opposed to the sins, and that any sins committed have not been wilful ones; and the Lord, according to his covenant of grace with us, agrees to accept the intention of our hearts as instead of the actual, full, complete, perfect obedience to the divine requirement in thought and in word and in act. This petition, then, signifies that we recognize that the robe of Christ's righteousness granted to us has

become spotted or sullied, and that we desire to be cleansed, so that we may again be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. On the contrary, this cannot refer to wilful sins, because, as the Apostle explains, if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, and hence no more a basis for forgiveness; and the end of wilful sin is Second Death. It is, however, proper to remark that there are what might be termed mixed sins – sins in which a measure of wilfulness may have combined with a measure of ignorance or inherited weakness.

In the case of such sins the Lord expresses his willingness to cancel the wrong upon its being properly repented of, but he reserves to himself the giving of stripes, or chastisements appropriate and necessary to his child as an instruction in righteousness, and correction of weaknesses, etc. Happy are they who, with growth in grace and knowledge, find their hearts so fully in accord with the principles of the divine arrangement that they will never transgress with any measure of wilfulness; but blessed also are those who, finding some measure of wilfulness in their deflections from the divine rule, are pained thereby, and who, as the Apostle says, are led to discipline or correct themselves that they may the more quickly learn the lessons, and bring their bodies more completely into subjection to the new mind – "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."

**(7) "FOR WE ALSO FORGIVE EVERYONE THAT IS
INDEBTED TO US."**

Again Matthew's rendering is better: "Those who trespass against us." As we are imperfect and cannot keep the divine law, so likewise others are imperfect. As the degrees of deflection from the divine law vary with the degrees of the fall, so also we must expect

that the trespasses of ourselves and others, one against another, will vary, according to natural temperament, weakness, etc. As we realize that we have received, and will still need, divine compassion and mercy in respect to our shortcomings, so the Lord teaches us that **[R3353 : page 121]** we must exercise similar benevolence toward our fellow-creatures, both in the Church and outside. Elsewhere he lays down this rule very stringently, that if we do not from our heart forgive those trespassing against us, neither will our heavenly Father forgive our trespasses. Thus the Lord would develop in his consecrated people the spirit of the Father, even as he instructed us, saying: "Be ye holy, even as your Father which is in heaven is holy."

That is to be the standard. However far short of it we may come, we can have no lower standard than that; and in proportion as we are striving for that standard and realize our own weaknesses and imperfections, we should have proportionate compassion upon fellow-creatures and their shortcomings toward us. This is love, sympathy, compassion, – and whoever does not attain this degree of love which will have compassion upon others and their weaknesses, and which would be ready to forgive them and glad to forgive them; and whoever does not succeed in this matter to the extent of being able to love his enemies, so as to even pray for them, that person fails to reach the mark of character which the Lord demands, and he may be sure that his own deviations from perfect rectitude will not be overlooked, because he is lacking the one important quality of love, which covers a multitude of sins of every kind. None, surely, will gain a place in the Kingdom class, in the Bride class, except they have this forgiving quality, this quality of love.

(8) "BRING US NOT INTO TEMPTATION."

We are to remember the words of the Apostle (Jas. 1:13) to the effect that God tempteth no man, and we are to apply this thought to the prayer. So doing our prayer will not signify that we fear God will

tempt us, but that we entreat him that he may guide our steps, our cares in life, so that no temptation, no trial, shall come upon us that would be too severe for us; that he may bring us by a way in which we will not be tempted above that we are able, and provide a way of escape. when we are sore distressed. The Apostle assures us that this is the divine will, and that such a prayer would be in accordance with it. He says God will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with every temptation provide also a way of escape. The temptations are of the Adversary, and of our own fallen natures – through our own flesh, and through the weaknesses of others. God is not responsible for these, but he is able to so guide the way of his people that they shall not be overwhelmed in these natural difficulties, weaknesses, besetments, nor by the wiles of the Adversary.

(9) "BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL."

These words are not found in the original, but corresponding words are found in Matthew's record: "Deliver us from the Evil One." There never was a time when there was greater need of this petition than at present. The Evil one is specially seeking to trap and ensnare the Lord's people in the present time, and the Scriptures inform us that God is permitting this, and, in that sense of the word, that he is sending strong delusions – permitting the Adversary to bring strong delusions upon the world and upon the nominal church. Our Father is permitting this because the time has come for a complete separation of the wheat from the tares. He has promised, however, that those who are truly of the wheat class – the sanctified in Christ Jesus, who are seeking to walk in his steps – shall not be stumbled, shall never fall, but shall have an abundant entrance ministered unto them into the everlasting Kingdom. The question, then, is one of loyalty of heart to the Lord.

The trial of this day shall try the work of every man [in the Church] of what sort it is. It will be so severe that if it were possible

the very elect would be deceived; but this will not be possible, because the Lord will specially care for these. Nevertheless the Lord will be inquired of by his people in respect to these matters which he has already promised, and as they pray, Deliver us from the Evil One, they surely will labor in the same direction. It is our expectation that very shortly now the forces of evil will gain much greater strength than at present, with all deceivableness of unrighteousness; and meantime the Lord is staying the adverse forces that his true people may put on the armor of God and be able to stand when the evil day shall come.

FAITH AND HOPE DEVELOPED BY DELAY.

In verses 5-8 our Lord gives us a parable, showing how importunity might bring an answer from an earthly friend who at first declined a request. Our Lord uses the illustration in respect to the heavenly Father, not by way of implying that God is averse to his people's requests and will only grant them when their comings become tedious to him, but by way of showing what patient persistency men will have in connection with some slight earthly favor desired, and as illustrating how the Lord's people need to be much more solicitous and earnest in respect to the heavenly blessings they desire. Our heavenly Father has good things; he has promised them to us; he takes delight in giving them to us, yet some of them are afar off. For instance, he has allowed his dear people to pray, Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven, for nearly nineteen centuries. Why has he not answered the petition sooner? Why did he suggest that we should so pray, if the answer were to be so long delayed?

We reply that the Lord had a plan, including the time for the Kingdom, already mapped out before he taught us to pray for it; and that the prayer of now **[R3354 : page 122]** nearly nineteen centuries, going up from the hearts of his people, have been blessings to their hearts, and have led them to appreciate and long for the Kingdom far

more than if they had not thus prayed. The longing for the Kingdom has been a blessing of itself and has been an encouragement, and so we are praying today, more earnestly perhaps than ever before, Thy Kingdom come, because we appreciate the need of God's Kingdom more and more as we get down to the time when it will be ready to be given to us.

ASKING, SEEKING, KNOCKING.

Our Lord's words in conclusion of the lesson are very soul-satisfying to those who have faith: "I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." We have the Master's words for this, but we are to remember the order as already expressed to us in prayer; we are to ask nothing that will not be hallowing and honoring to our heavenly Father's name; we are to ask nothing that would be an interference in any measure or degree with the coming of his Kingdom, or the doing of his will on earth as in heaven; we are to ask in harmony with the divine plan, and to be assured that that divine plan, revealed in the Word and prayed for by us, will ultimately be fully accomplished, and that it will be a most heart-satisfying portion when we do receive it.

The asking, seeking and knocking are to be done by us individually. We may ask the Lord for a share in the Kingdom, and may labor for it, praying his blessing upon our labors; but we may not attempt to direct the divine arrangement and to ask the Lord to specially favor others in connection with the Kingdom. Because some one is related to us and very dear according to the flesh, is no reason why we should conclude that the Lord would necessarily choose such an one for a member of his Bride. On the contrary, we are to preach the Word to such an one, to tell him of God's goodness and grace, and of the Kingdom, and of the blessing, and to encourage him to make a consecration of himself to the Lord; and, in connection with that consecration, we are to urge him to ask for himself, to seek

for himself and to know for himself that he may receive and find and enter into the blessed favors of the Lord.

**EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT COMETH FROM
THE FATHER.**

Our Lord appeals to the fatherly spirit in man, reminding his hearers of how they would delight to give good gifts of food to their children, how they would not only not give them something poisonous or injurious when they asked for good blessings, but they would not even give them the injurious things when asked for. Much more is our heavenly Father good, kind, benevolent, and disposed to bless his children. Much more will he give to us the right things. We have thought of this frequently when hearing some of our dear friends praying that the Lord would baptize them with fire, as he promised in the Scriptures. We are rejoiced to think that God, in his goodness, would not answer that prayer, would not take advantage of the misunderstanding of the matter, and answer a prayer which would be so injurious to the petitioner. What they desired was a measure of divine blessing; what they were asking for was the curse, or trouble which came upon the chaff in the end of the Jewish age, and which is again to come upon the tares in the end of Gospel age.

We trust that the Lord's people will more and more cultivate a spirit of prayer, and that so doing they will more and more appreciate their relationship to God as children, and come to him as to a father, with simplicity, with sincerity. We are not at all advocating the thought that is today so prevalent, of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. That false doctrine finds no place in the Word of God. God does not stand sponsor for the depraved race as it now appears. He was the father of Adam in his perfection, but these imperfections, which have come to have so prominent a place in the children of Adam, the Lord declares to be of the Adversary, and to some he said, of his day, Ye are of your father, the devil, and his works ye do. In order to get back again into the family of God, as

Adam was, a son of God, before he sinned, it is necessary for us to go by the appointed way – through the merit of Jesus, the merit of his sacrifice for our sins. More than this, having been thus justified as sons on the human plane, we have been accepted in the beloved one to sonship, as New Creatures in Christ. It is from this standpoint that we come to the Father, from this standpoint that we have our fellowship, and from this standpoint that we are hoping, trusting, believing that all things are working together for good to us, because we love God and have been called according to his purpose.

