

WHO MAY PRAY AND FOR WHAT?

– FEBRUARY 1. – LUKE 11:1-13. –

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

APPARENTLY Jesus usually prayed alone. We read that on some occasions He spent the entire night in prayer to God. How inconsistent that would have been if He Himself were the Father, who for a time was with men and outwardly appeared as the "Man Christ Jesus"! But how consistent is the thought of Jesus' prayer to the Father when taken in connection with His own declaration: "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28); "I came not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me" (John 6:38); "Of Mine own self I can do nothing; as I hear [of My Father], I judge." – John 5:30.

Instead of being the Father masquerading as a man, Jesus was the Logos, the Word, or Message of God, whom the Father had sanctified and sent into the world to be the world's Redeemer, and who by and by is to be its King, to deliver it from the power of Satan and sin, and to restore the willing and obedient to the Divine likeness, the Father's favor and everlasting life. – Isaiah 25:6-8; Romans 8:21.

Realizing the importance of His mission, Jesus kept properly in touch with the great Author of the Plan of Salvation, His Heavenly Father. His prayers were not mockeries; they were sincere. He worshiped the Father [R5379 : page 8] in spirit and in truth, as He declared all must do who would be acceptable to the Father.

No doubt the disciples noted the Master's frequency in prayer, and the blessing which He seemed to receive therefrom. Instead of urging them to pray, Jesus by His example taught them to desire the privilege and blessing of prayer. In due time they requested instruction, saying, "Lord, teach us to pray!" It is well that we inquire

who may pray, and for what things we may petition the great Creator, else we might be praying without authority, or praying amiss, as St. James declares some do.

There is a difference between worship – adoration, homage – and prayer. Any one may offer homage to the Lord, bow the knee or express thanks and appreciation. But as for making requests of God, prayers, this privilege is distinctly limited. The Jews were privileged to offer prayer, because they as a nation were in typical relationship with God under the Law Covenant, as a "House of Servants." But the Gentiles had no privilege of approaching God in prayer until after the Jewish favor had ended – three and a half years after the crucifixion of Jesus.

The first Gentile whose prayers were received, according to the Bible, was Cornelius. And even his prayers were not acceptable until he had been instructed respecting Christ and His redemption work and had become a follower of Jesus. Then his prayers and his consecration were acceptable to the Father, and he was received into the family of God as a son. Then as a son he had the right or privilege of prayer. – Acts 10:25-48.

So today while any one may offer worship and reverence to God, none is privileged to pray unless he has become a consecrated disciple of Jesus, except it be the immature children of such consecrated persons. All over the world today's lesson will be misinterpreted. Jesus' words, "Our Father," will be misinterpreted to signify the "Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man." The **[R5379 : page 9]** context will be ignored. The fact that these were consecrated disciples, and not mankind in general, who were instructed to pray "our Father," will be ignored.

There is a general tendency to ignore personal faith in the redeeming blood – to ignore the fact that no man cometh unto the Father but by the Son. (John 14:6.) Adam indeed was created a son of God; but his disobedience and death sentence cancelled the

relationship, which cannot be restored except in God's appointed way – through Christ. Prayer is a wonderful privilege. It is not for sinners, but for those who have been justified by the great Advocate whom the Father has appointed – Jesus.

"AFTER THIS MANNER PRAY"

The model prayer which Jesus gave His followers is grandly simple. It is devoid of selfishness. Instead of "I" and "me," the prayer is comprehensive of all who are truly the Lord's people, in any class – we, us, our. It is unselfish, too, in that it is not a prayer for earthly blessings. Only one petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," can be construed to apply to even the simplest of earthly blessings. And this may also be understood to signify more particularly spiritual nourishment.

The prayer opens with a reverent acknowledgment of the greatness and sacredness of the Heavenly Father's name, or character. Next comes an acknowledgment of the present condition of sin in the world and an acknowledgment of faith in the promise that God has given, that eventually His Kingdom shall be established in the earth, and shall overthrow the reign of Sin and Death which has prevailed for six thousand years, and will bind Satan, "the Prince of this world." (Rev. 20:1-3.) The petition, "Thy Kingdom come," not only manifests faith in God and in His promise to abolish sin and establish righteousness in the earth, but it means more; namely, that the suppliant is in his heart in sympathy with God and His righteousness and out of sympathy with the reign of Sin and Death.

The next petition is, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in Heaven." This signifies full confidence in the promise of God that His Kingdom when it shall be established will not be a failure – that Satan will be bound; that the reign of Sin and Death will end; that the light of the knowledge of the glory of God will fill the whole earth and triumph, destroying all wilful opposers, until finally every knee shall be bowing and every tongue confessing, to the glory of God.

It is an expression of confidence that the Kingdom will effect the full restoration of the earth to its Edenic condition and of man to his primeval perfection in the image of his Creator; for not until such conditions prevail will it be possible for God's will to be as perfectly done on earth as it is now done in Heaven. An included thought is that when sin and death shall thus have been effaced, the world of mankind will be as happy in God's favor as are the angels now. This Jesus clearly expressed later, assuring us that eventually there will be no more sighing, crying or dying, because all the former things of sin and death will have passed away. – Rev. 21:5.

The request for daily bread implies our realization that our sustenance, both temporal and spiritual, must come from God. And the failure to specify any particular kind of food implies not only a hunger and desire on our part, but a full resignation to the provision of Divine Wisdom.

When the justified pray, "Forgive us our trespasses," they do not refer to Original Sin; for they were freed from that condemnation in their justification. By trespasses are signified those unintentional imperfections which appertain to all, and which all the followers of Jesus are striving to overcome. The request that we shall have forgiveness of our blemishes as we are generous and forgiving toward those who trespass against us is a reminder of the general terms of our relationship to God. We cannot grow in grace and abide in the sunshine of God's favor except as we cultivate the spirit of love, which is the spirit of God – a forgiving spirit, a generous spirit, in our dealings with others. God thus purposes to favor more especially those who particularly strive to exemplify His gracious mercy.

"Abandon us not in temptation" indicates that we are aware that we are surrounded by the powers of evil, and that as New Creatures we would be unable to withstand these successfully except as we should have Divine aid. "Deliver us from the Evil One" is a

recognition that Satan is our great Adversary; and that we are on the alert to resist him, and yet realize our own insufficiency, our need of Divine aid. "We are not ignorant of his [Satan's] devices." (2 Corinthians 2:11.) "We wrestle not against flesh and blood [merely], but against wicked spirits in high positions." – Ephesians 6:12.

"SEEK, KNOCK, ASK – AND RECEIVE"

In the concluding verses of the Study, Jesus admonished that the prayer should be with fervency or earnestness, and not merely lifeless, formal words. He gave the illustration of the man who at first refused to be disturbed, even by his friend, but was finally moved by the earnestness of his friend's petition. So when we pray for God's Kingdom to come and His will to be done, as it delays long, we are not to think that our prayers are unheeded. We are praying in harmony with the Divine promise, and although we are not hastening the Kingdom by our prayers we are entering into a blessing of rest through faith, by continually bringing before our minds these promises of God, and thus waiting upon the Lord for the fulfilment of His promise.

What God really wishes to give to His people is His Holy Spirit. Because of the imperfections of the flesh none of us can be filled with the Spirit at first, as was our perfect Master. But as we come to God desiring to be filled with His spirit, desiring to be in harmony with Him, desiring to be in His character-likeness, by the seeking we find, and to our knocking the door is opened.

Nor should we be afraid that our Heavenly Father would give any bad answer to our requests. Would an earthly parent give to a hungry child a stone when it asked for bread; a serpent when it asked for fish; a scorpion when it asked for an egg? Surely not! We are to know that our Heavenly Father is much better than we, much kinder, much more just and loving, and that He delights to give His good gifts, His Holy Spirit, to those consecrated disciples of Jesus who earnestly seek it.

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"A little talk with Jesus –
How it smooths the rugged road!
How it seems to help me onward,
When I faint beneath my load!
When my heart is crushed with sorrow,
And my eyes with tears are dim,
There is naught can yield me comfort
Like a little talk with Him.

"The way is sometimes weary
To yonder nearing clime,
But a little talk with Jesus
Has helped me many a time.
The more I come to know Him,
And all His grace explore,
It sets me ever longing
To know Him more and more."

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