

Luke 38 – Prayer

There have been thousands of people throughout the centuries who have endeavored to do God's work on this earth. Some go with talent, wealth, and the support of family and friends, only to be cursed with failure. Others, with very little of any of these three things, but armed with prayer, went out into the world and triumphed for the cause of Jesus Christ, though they suffered horrendously. The Bible describes these people at the end of Hebrews 11, where it says, "Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."

Why is it that some succeed and others fail in the work of God? The answer is prayer. Prayer is communication with God. It is ridiculous to think that anyone can do God's work without God's help. The Bible says that as Christians go into the world, they are met with numerous kinds of opposition. Ephesians 6:12 says "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." It says in 1 Peter 5:8: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." We are at war, and cannot and will not win without the power of God.

This goes for those in God's service as well as those who are not called to serve God in any kind of official capacity. Prayer is vital to the Christian life, and I would like to talk about prayer this morning out of the book of Luke, specifically chapter 11. The last time we met, we went through what is known as "the Lord's Prayer." It is contained in verses 2-4: "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil." I call to your remembrance several things we said about prayer last time.

First, prayer is not repeating a magical formula to God in order to coerce Him into getting what we want. Prayer is a privilege afforded to believers by God, and wise Christians will take advantage of it whenever they can. It is not certain words we say, as if God loved to hear certain phrases repeated. Some churches teach this, even with the Lord's Prayer, but Jesus said in Matthew 6:7: "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." When you pray, do not use what Jesus calls "vain repetitions," thinking that that will be heard by God.

Second, prayer is not just asking, although that is included in prayer. Remember we said that the Lord's Prayer provided a pattern of four different things that should be in our prayers, and we added a fifth. Those five elements are Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication, Intercession, and Praise. Confession is done because God wants the pathway clear between us and Him. Psalms 66:18 says "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." When we confess our sins, God forgives and we are free to pray, nothing hindering us. Thanksgiving is part of prayer because it recognizes the very reason we are praying to God: we are dependant upon Him. When we thank Him, we recognize that He has given us what we have.

Supplication is making our requests known unto God, and we will talk about this aspect, found in the next few verses. Intercession is prayer for others, whether for their health, their conversion, or other needs. Paul mentions these prayers the most often in his letters, saying in Colossians 1:3 "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you." Praise is an acknowledgment of the person of God and His attributes, held in perfection. These are five elements that ought to be in our prayers.

One of these aspects, supplication, is what is talked about in the verses immediately after the Lord's Prayer. Jesus, having talked to His disciples about prayer after they asked for teaching, says in Luke 11:5-8:

“And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.” Jesus gives a parable to His disciples to help them better understand not only the importance and privilege of prayer, but how God loves to hear when people pray and meet their needs. Jesus tells a story that was very familiar to His Jewish disciples living in the first century, but may not be familiar to us.

To understand this story fully, one must understand the prevailing custom of the day of hospitality. In today's American society, we are much less likely to help complete strangers, especially if meeting their need meant either financial hardship or an inconvenience. Imagine if someone came to your house and asked if he could spend the night on your couch? If you even opened the door, you would tell that person to go and find a hotel. If you were a nice person and thought that the person couldn't afford one, you might give him money for his hotel room. You certainly would not let them stay in your house. If an old friend stopped by unexpectedly, you may put her up, but you would consider the person rude for not calling to set something up beforehand all the same.

This was not so in this culture. If someone came to your door, you were expected not only to feed them, but to put them up for as long as they needed. This is why the story of Lot in the city of Sodom is so appalling. Lot was responsible for his guests when they came into the city, and the men of the city wanted at them. This is why when the angels appeared to Abraham, Manoah, and Gideon, they provided food for them, not realizing who they were. This was different than providing for the poor. It was the way of the nomad, which Abraham and the Israelites in some ways were. As a nomad, you were obliged to provide for others. To refuse food and shelter in the desert meant certain death for that person. This custom made its way into the lives of the people even after they settled into houses. It was for this reason that Paul said that the leaders of the church had to be hospitable. He says in 1 Timothy 3:2: “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach.”

In this story, a man comes to a friend looking for food. The problem is that he came at midnight. This friend would no doubt have given his friend that for which he was looking if it had been day, but this man comes at midnight, when everyone is asleep. He says that he wants three loaves of bread. In these times, there were a few different kinds of loaves of bread, as we have today. Artisan breads are round, French bread is long and narrow, and regular bread is boxy and shorter. In these days, a loaf of bread could mean a small biscuit, a round loaf, or a thin bread much like a tortilla. Probably what is meant here are the small biscuits. He does not need much food, just enough to give to his friend. He explains that his friend has come on a long journey. For whatever reason, this man does not have any bread in his house to give his traveling friend, and needs some. To be unable to give him food was not only a great insult, but a great disgrace as well.

However, the man inside the house is not obligated to give this traveler any food, since he has not come to his house. He is not obliged to his friend, either, since he is not the one who has been traveling. He says, “Trouble me not.” For him to provide for his friend would be a bother and nuisance. Why? The next phrase answers this: “the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.” Once the door was shut for the night, it was shut until the morning. Probably this man is speaking to his friend through a window. The second reason he gives is that his children are in bed with him. You might think that this was because of a bad dream or a strange man outside asking for bread, but in actuality, this was common practice. Remember that houses of this day were not as nice and as elaborate as our American houses. The house you live in would have been a palace to a first century person.

The houses of most peasants consisted of one room divided into two parts. The first part of the room near the door was made of dirt, and was where the cooking and living was done. The second part of the room was a raised platform where the family ate and where they slept. Sleeping was not done on beds, but on mats laid out on this small platform. Families, then, slept together, since there was room for little else. This man tells his friend that he cannot rise and give the bread to him because his children are in bed with him and to rise would most likely disturb them. He finally and bluntly says, "I cannot rise and give thee."

Yet his friend desperately needs those loaves that his friend has not denied that he has. He cannot leave without that food, and so continues to request them. Finally, Jesus says, he gets his request. The man begrudgingly gets out of bed, probably waking the baby, and gives his friend the loaves for his traveling friend. Now Jesus makes a comparison. Is this a picture of God? God is the comfortable friend, and is bothered with our prayers? Is it irksome to God that we would come and ask Him for the things we need, even at bad times? What does this show about the heart of God? Luke 11:8 says: "I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth." That word "importunity" is a persistent asking for something. It is a begging.

Jesus tells a similar story in Luke 18, at which we will look in detail later. It is about a woman who wants to be avenged of a wrong and goes to see the judge. The judge, however, is too busy for her, yet she dogs him. She continues to come to Him for help, and finally he says, "because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me." Jesus in that passage makes another comparison, similar to the one found in our passage. He says, "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?" Jesus says that God is not tired of hearing our prayer requests. He loves to hear us when we pray. Jesus is saying here in Luke 11 and there in Luke 18 that if a friend and a judge will answer our requests because of our badgering them, how much better of a response should we expect from our heavenly Father? If humans who are supposed to help us act in charitable ways, why should we expect less from God?

Friend, God wants to hear your prayers. He wants to know what is on your heart, despite the fact that He already knows. He wants communication with you, and He wants you to depend on Him for everything. He doesn't need it, but wants it all the same. Please do not think that you must crawl to God on your hands and knees, begging for Him to hear you. He is a God who has graciously and generously given you access to Him through prayer, and He wants you to take advantage of it. The problem is not Christians who want to pray but can't, but Christians who can pray but don't. Pray, talking with God. This is what the next verses say.

Luke 11:9-10 says "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." This instruction is repeated almost verbatim in Matthew 7:7-8. It includes three instructions: Ask, seek, knock. All of these are different pictures that depict prayer.

The first command is to ask. To ask is to make a request. Part of prayer is asking God for different things. We have a diversity of examples of prayer requests in the Bible. The Bible says in 1 Kings 18 that Elijah the prophet made a request for rain, which had been scarce for three years. He prayed seven times and God gave him his request. James 5:16-18 says "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias [or Elijah] was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

Another example of making requests is in 2 Kings 19. The Assyrians threaten to flatten Jerusalem and take everyone captive. The leader writes a letter to the king of Jerusalem and tells him that God cannot protect the city. The Bible says that King Hezekiah brought the letter into the Temple and made a request to God: "LORD, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, LORD, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God. Now therefore, O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his

hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD God, even thou only.” God answered the prayer of Hezekiah by sending an angel to destroy the army of the Assyrians. All Hezekiah needed to do was ask. In ancient times, if someone wanted a prayer answered, they offered some sacrifice to their gods. Sometimes, as in the case of the King of Moab in 2 Kings 3, they offered their children. We need only ask. Philippians 4:6 says “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”

The second command is to “seek.” This is a picture of someone searching for something. For what are we looking when we pray? The first thing we may look for is God’s perfect Will. Sometimes we pray for things that are not what God wants for us. We pray for things that will please us, not God. This is what happened to the people to whom James was writing. He says in James 4:3 “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.” Instead, we ought to pray for God’s Will in prayer. We ought to pray the prayer of Jesus: “Not my will, but thine be done.” When we find what God’s Will is, God promises to hear our prayer.

We have examples of this in Scripture as well. In 2 Samuel, David asks God if he can make a Temple for the LORD. God visits him and tells King David that it is not His will for David to build a temple, but for his son King Solomon. God has a Plan and a Will, and answers David’s request according to His own Will. In Acts 16, Paul wants to go into a region called “Bysinia,” but it is not the Will of God. Paul and his companion pray, searching for God’s Will, and God sends a vision of a man from another region, asking them to come and preach the Gospel to them. This came after seeking God’s will. 1 John 5:14 says “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.” It says in 1 John 3:22 “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” This is praying in God’s Will, and obeying Him to stay in His Will. When we obey, we do God’s Will, and we are more apt to pray for things in God’s Will.

The second thing we seek is the welfare of others. Many times we meet those who have bad health and are suffering terribly. When we pray, we are in a way desperately seeking their welfare through making requests. This was the case in the story found in 2 Kings 4. The Bible tells of a little boy who gets very sick and dies. The mother goes to Elisha and asks for help. 2 Kings 4:32-33 says “And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD.” God answered the prayer when Elisha asked for the welfare of this mother, and brought this boy back to life. When we pray, we are seeking the requests for which we are looking. If we pray according to God’s Will, we know we have our requests.

The third aspect of our prayers is to knock. When we think of knocking, we think of a door. Usually when we knock on someone’s door, we are trying to come into someone else’s house. This is the idea that we want entrance into their house, and that we want to commune with them. This is, again, the idea of prayer. When we pray, we are knocking on heaven’s door, asking to talk with the Proprietor. We are wanting the ear of the One inside the home. The idea isn’t just that we want something, like asking, but that we want to speak to God. The idea isn’t simply to remain at the door, but to go inside.

Sometimes when you knock at someone’s door, you must knock a little while before it is opened. This reiterates the idea of persistence. Too many times we pray for something once and never think to do it again, when God wants us to persist in prayer. It is not that God needs us to pray for a certain length of time, but that He wants to answer our requests in His timing. When we pray for something the first time, God will start in motion the events that will answer our prayer when He sees fit. This is seen in examples in the Bible. The people of Israel had been praying for a deliverer, but God allowed Moses to be a shepherd in the wilderness for forty years before answering their request. The Israelites knocked for forty years, and when conditions were right, God opened the door to them.

When we ask, seek, and knock, Jesus offers us a promise. He says, “For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” Here is the promise of God to you: If you pray, God will hear your prayers. God answers them, though it may not be how you think that they should be answered. Jesus gives us not only permission to pray, but tells us that we should pray. When we pray, God hears and answers. This promise is found in other passages of Scripture as well. In Jeremiah 33:3, God says “Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.” Jesus said in Matthew 21:22 “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” He says something similar in Mark 11:24: “Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” In John 15:7, Jesus said, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”

There may be those this morning that are listening to me and saying, “I prayed once and God didn’t answer my prayer. Where was that promise when I needed it?” Friend, we have already demonstrated a few reasons that this may have been true. The first is that perhaps you did not pray according to God’s Will. If you pray for a brand new car, God may not give you that, because you would just flaunt it in front of others and commit sin. If you pray to win the lottery, it may be that God doesn’t want you involved in gambling. This may be one reason you did not have your prayer answered. The second is that you may have not prayed in faith. Sometimes we ask for things, not really believing that God will give them to us. Remember the words of Matthew 21:22, which said: “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” What a great opportunity to demonstrate our faith in our God but through prayer.

The fact is that God wants to hear our prayers and answer them. He delights to give us the things for which we are asking when we are asking in His Will. If God has called you to a specific ministry and you are praying for help to overcome a fear, God will answer that prayer. If you are praying for Godly wisdom, God will answer that prayer. He says as much in James 1:5: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” God delights in giving us what we want, and Jesus demonstrates this with yet another parable, found in verses 11-13: “If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”

Jesus gives a parable of a parent and a son, and three requests that are made. The first example is one of a son asking for bread. Bread was a staple in life, and was sometimes even synonymous with life. In fact, the bread that was made like our tortillas was the bread that people in the first century used as utensils. They did not have forks or spoons, but used bread to eat their soup. Bread was necessary, and so Jesus talks about a boy asking his parent for something he needs. The Bible has much to say about God taking care of our needs. This is how one of the most famous Psalms starts out: “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

He says in Psalm 34:9 “O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him.” Jesus talked about how God meets our needs in His famous “Sermon on the Mount.” He said, “Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

“Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need

of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” God has promised to meet our needs. He says in Psalm 37:25: “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.” God delights in meeting our needs.

In this parable, Jesus says, “If your son asks you for bread, which is necessary for life, would you give him a stone, which cannot be eaten?” While stones and bread look similar, Jesus is saying that they are fundamentally different from one another when it comes to nutrition and substance. Jesus’ audience would have thought to themselves: “Of course we wouldn’t!” He asks the same thing in the next parable, saying, “if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?” Again, fish and serpents can look similar, but are fundamentally different, especially to a Jew. Jews were not allowed to eat certain animals, including snakes, though I’m not sure they would want to. But more important, a snake wasn’t eaten as a fish was. Moreover, depending on the snake, the father’s gift could actually bring harm to the son! Jesus’ audience would have again said, “Of course we wouldn’t give our sons serpents!”

While fish were also a staple, they were not as important as bread. Fish was not eaten every day in that culture. It was a special treat eaten maybe once or twice a week. This is a picture, not of our needs, but things that make our lives a little more pleasant. We need air to breathe, so God gives it. But once in a while He carries that air on a wonderful summer breeze, filled with the fragrance of a flower. This is of what this parable is speaking. Psalms 84:11 says “the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” God gives good things to those He loves, whether they are genuine needs or not.

Jesus then gives His final picture, this one the most drastic. He says, “Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?” If fish were a treat, eggs were a rare treat. Never in the Bible do you find anyone eating eggs, though there is provision for them in Deuteronomy 22:6. Eggs were not eaten very often, possibly because they were hard to find, and probably small. Jesus pictures a son asking a father for one of these special eggs to eat. Instead of saying, “No, son. We don’t have any and you don’t need one!” the father in Jesus’ story gives his son a scorpion, which is liable to sting him. Jesus asks his audience, “Would any of you do this?” The answer must have been a resounding, “NO!” All of these scenarios are out of the question.

Jesus then draws some conclusions. He makes the point that those listening to Him are not perfect, but are evil. They are not the perfect parents, yet they shower their children with love and gifts, and enjoy giving them good things. Jesus says to them, “If you do that, and you are not perfect, just think of the utter delight that God has in answering our prayers!” He actually says, “give the Holy Spirit,” which is the most important gift that we can have. I hope to address this in the future at some point. This morning, I want you to be impressed with the idea of prayer. I want you to realize what a privilege we have to pray and how we should want to do so every day.

There may be someone out there this morning who does not know Christ as Saviour. Friend, if you will this morning pray the prayer of faith, Jesus will hear. Romans 10:13 says “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Right where you are, you can ask God’s forgiveness and be made a new creature. You can have new life in Christ, and enter into a new relationship with God the Father, the One who wants to hear and answer your prayers. If you have any questions about what I have said this morning, please don’t hesitate to contact us. You can do so in the following ways:

You can stop by our church building, which is located at 909 W. 8th St., by the softball diamonds. You can call us at 732-3321. You can E-mail us at church@fbcpr.org. That’s CHURCH at F B C P R dot O R G. Or you can log on to our website, which is www.fbcpr.org. If you would like to have a copy of this broadcast, either in audio or transcript form, you can find it on our website tomorrow. If you enjoy this program, let us know by contacting our church. Please join us this morning at 10:30 for our worship service. Please join us again next week for the Way of Truth Radio Broadcast, brought to you by the First Baptist Church of Park Rapids, MN.