

The Gospel According to Luke

October 7, 2018

Reading: Matthew 7:7-11

Sermon #20

Luke 6:12-16

(Mt. 10:1-4 & Mk. 3:13-19)

Ordinary Men, Extraordinary Calling: Part I

Prayer

In the story of Jesus calling 12 men to be his Apostles only Luke tells us that Jesus prayed to God his Father all night. This is not mentioned in the parallel passages found in Matthew 10 and Mark 3. Luke 6:12 reads, “**In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.**” It is this verse we will focus on this morning. Why did Jesus need to pray? Jesus had a number of disciples and he had a great need to choose the right 12 as Apostles. Why did Jesus, God the Son, pray all night?

The answer is Jesus had set aside his divine powers as Paul wrote in Philippians, “**Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**” (Philippians 2:5-8) For the redemption of the world, for the planting of Christ’s church what could have been more critical than the calling of the Twelve Apostles? Jesus needed to know the will of the Father. In verse 12 we read “**all night he continued in prayer to God.**” No short power prayer. No – God here is my request and I will wait for answer. Jesus engaged in protracted prayer, heart filled, spirit filled prayer poured out for hours. To be honest I have spent this kind of time in prayer, but not recently and I stand here convicted of my allowing the world to get in the way of not minutes but hours that should be spent with God.

You may have wondered why the Scripture reading this morning was from Matthew chapter 7 where Jesus' instruction concerning prayer is recorded. I want to spend our time with our need for prayer. Let's pause for a moment and consider the relationship that is possible with God. We all would agree God is infinitely strong and there is no lack in what he can do. God is infinitely righteous there is not one fleeting idea of sin in him – he only does what is right. God is infinitely good; therefore, everything he does is good and defines what is good. God is infinitely wise, so what he does is perfect and it is righteous and good and true. God is the only being who is able to infinitely love; agape love is possible because of his unbounded strength, righteousness, goodness and wisdom. When God calls one to salvation it is he who raises one to a level above the world by placing himself as Spirit in their soul. This is what Jesus understood and had full confidence in as he poured himself out and God filled him with wisdom and God provided the perfect solution and answer for his great need.

Now as we consider Jesus who was both God and man making this effort – does it not raise your joy and make you want to seek God as Jesus did and can one not expect an experience of God spiritually which is beyond our ability? Is not the image in your mind filled with awe and wonder - to be able to come before God and pray like Jesus?

Yet, one of the tragedies of the post-modern church is how little time is actually spent in prayer. The Creator of the universe offers us the greatest of opportunities – to engage in dialog with him. God is all knowing and knows each person's heart. But how can humans know God's heart; there are only two ways, first, God's Word; the study and hearing the preaching of His inspired Word and second, coming into his presence through prayer. Why do I, and why do you, let the business of the world impede our time with God? Yes, it may have been easier

in some ways 2000 years ago to focus on God because there was less static from the world for it was not as hectic. However, we have no excuse.

Our prayer time should be like a banquet with God. He sends us an invitation as his children saying “ ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ ¹⁸ But they all many alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.’ ¹⁹ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’ ²⁰ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ ” (Luke 14:17-20) These men let the world interfere with who they are called to be in Christ. So it is my prayer for you that through our time in God’s Word and your study of it that there would awaken in your heart and soul a desire to pray, to pray more. Our text in Luke chapter 6, verse 12 says, “In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.” I want to stop here and move to Matthew chapter 7 and examine the encouragements of Jesus for us to pray. Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 7, verses 7 to 11.

Jesus Summonses Us To Pray

E. M. Bounds born in the 19th century was both an attorney and pastor. He wrote 9 books on prayer – they are as rich as they are deep and meaningful. We do not have that much time this morning to exhaustively look at prayer. I would encourage you to read Bounds to better understand prayer for his insights have helped me greatly. However, this morning I will limit myself to Matthew chapter 7. Reading verses 7 and 8, “**Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.** ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” The repetition adds emphasizes what Jesus wants us to focus on - ask, seek and knock.

Ask your heavenly Father for what you need. Ask your Father for his wisdom to answer the troubles on your heart. Seek your Father for he is open to hear you and expose his heart to your heart and give you his wisdom to meet your needs. Knock and not only will God open the door to his house, but to his heart as well. By these 3 - ask, seek and knock God will meet your needs and give you answers and wisdom. Jesus went to the Father and set the example. Jesus went to His Father, the one who Created him through Mary and it is God the Father full of righteousness and wisdom that gave Jesus the answers because of the importance in choosing the right 12.

I remember I would go to my earthy father for advice for all sorts of things I wanted to do or plan or consider as I made decisions. Why would I not have this same attitude, no not the same attitude, but humble myself in an attitude of complete dependency towards my heavenly Father? My needs for spiritual wisdom are desperate and God has the solutions that are right, even if they are not the solutions I had desired.

Jesus Makes Promises To Those Who Pray

We just saw Jesus give 3 invitations, but he also gives 6 promises in verses 7 and 8. “**Ask, and promise #1 it will be given to you**” verse 7 continues “**seek, and promise #2 you will find**” and the verse ends with “**knock, and promise #3 it will be opened to you.**” In verse 8, “**For everyone who asks #4 receives**” continuing “**the one who seeks #5 finds, and to the one who knocks #6 it will be opened.**” There is a 7th promise but we do not see it until the 2nd half of verse 11, **how much more will your Father who is in heaven #7 give good things to those who ask him!**” Jesus by the authority of God the Father promises 7 results to his children who make the effort to pray. Jesus wants to encourage people to come to God in

prayer, lay open their heart for prayer is not ritual but a time of connecting with God. God always answers and his answers are always good, even if we do not understand or like the answer.

God Makes Himself Available

Jesus said when one prays they are to ask, seek and knock. That is 3 different ways to come to God. When my earthy father was with me all I had to do was ask and he would answer – the answer might be “yes” or it might be “no” or it might be an explanation. When I was not with my dad I would seek him out – in the garage or yard or later by phone and he would answer. If I was not with my dad and went to find him and discovered he was in his study behind a closed door, I would knock. Sometimes he answered right away but at other times he would tell me to wait. If I waited he would at some point allow me in and help with the answer I sought. The point I am trying to make is it does not matter if you find God close at hand where he is touchable and you feel his breath by his nearness or if God is hard to see or even if there is barriers between you and God – he will hear and he will give good and right advice. Why do I know this? Because when you set the world aside and seek God only - he speaks truth to your heart.

Everyone Who Asks Receives

Jesus encourages all believers to pray because he promises that anyone who asks receives. In verse 8 Jesus says, “**For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.**” Jesus uses the word “**everyone**” leaving no doubt that when a believer prays it will work. However, if a person will not accept Jesus as their Savior then they do not have God as their Father. Without Jesus and God the Father these promises do not apply. John was clear when he wrote, “**to all who did receive him, who believed in**

his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:12) God’s promises given by his authority through Jesus the Son are only for those who have received Jesus as their Lord and Savior. For the children of the Living God the promise is clear – “**everyone**”, without exception, who asks receives good things from Jesus’ Father who has become their Father by adoption. Martin Luther explains Jesus’ motivation in telling us to come to God in prayer, he wrote, “*He meaning Jesus knows that we are timid and shy, that we feel unworthy and unfit to present our needs to God. ... We think that God is so great and we are so tiny that we do not dare to pray. ... That is why Christ wants to lure us away from such timid thoughts, to remove our doubts, and to have us go ahead confidently and boldly.*” Jesus is calling you to His Father, your Father to lay open your heart and receive God’s blessings.

Come To Your Father

Because it is implied here and is more explicit in other places in the New Testament – when we come to God through Jesus, our Lord and Savior, we are coming our Father for he has adopted us as his children. Reading verse 11 of Matthew chapter 7, “**If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!**” Even most unsaved fathers who belong to the world desire good for their children. When I was growing up my father was unsaved and he worked hard to provide and desired good for my mother, my brothers and me. Here is the greatest of all truths, at the age of 33 God awoke my dead soul and called me to Jesus and when Jesus became my Lord and Savior, God became my eternal Father and will always give me what is good. God is my Father and he is the Father of all who believe through Jesus the only direct Son and through Jesus we are adopted sons and daughters who receive God’s unlimited love.

God Is Our True Father

As much as we love our earthly fathers and they love us – it is God our heavenly Father who is perfect and gives only perfect and good things to us as his children. God our heaven Father is perfect and our earthly fathers, though they love us, are sinners. The Bible makes comparisons between our earthly fathers and our heavenly Father and it also shows us the differences. The writer of Hebrews explains, “we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” (Hebrews 12:9-11) Jesus wants believers to know God is your perfect Father and as good as our earthly fathers may be they are evil according to verse 11. Jesus is being blunt concerning the universal sinfulness of human beings. He is speaking to his disciples and knows they are fallen and sinful and therefore, evil. One mistake some make is limiting their view of God as their Father is by their experiences of their earthly father. Be encouraged for God your Father does not have any of the sins or limitations or weaknesses or flaws of your earthly father.

Jesus says fallen and sinful earthly fathers desire to give good things to their children. I know there are abusive earthly fathers also. God your Father is perfect and good and there is no evil in him. Most earthly fathers give good things to their children and some do not, but your heavenly Father always, always gives good things to those who ask. When you are adopted by God you remain a sinner which means you are evil, but God fills you with his Spirit to help you overcome evil and in spite of your evil nature you receive only good from God your Father.

God Is Goodness and Trustworthy

The Scriptures tell us God is a jealous God, a righteous God and a just God, but because he has adopted us as his children we can trust in his goodness. St. Augustine said, “For what would he not now give to sons when they ask, when he has already granted this very thing, namely, that they might be sons?” Simply, we become sons or children of God when we receive Jesus as our Savior. As the Apostle John wrote, “to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:12) Jesus said to the Pharisees, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me.” (John 8:42) They rejected Jesus and those who reject Jesus are not sons of God.

The Cross – Foundation Of Prayer

An important thought concerning prayer is that the cross is foundational. I say this because Jesus says we are evil and yet he also says we are the children of God. How can it be that a holy God adopts evil people? How can you and me be children of God? As evil sinners how can we ask and expect to receive, seek and expect to find and knock and expect for the door to be opened to the throne room of God?

Jesus answered these questions many times, let us cite a couple. In Matthew 20 verse 28 he says, “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Jesus gave his life as a ransom that we might be spared from God’s wrath and for God to see us through Jesus’ shed blood. Our sins are forgiven by Jesus’ sacrifice and we receive only good from God our Father. Again Matthew records the words of Jesus, “this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (26:28)

Our sins are forgiven when we trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. This is why even though Jesus calls all people evil, those who are the children of God through Jesus are allowed to ask, seek and knock – and God hears and only responds with good. This is why we close our prayers “**in the name of Jesus**” because everything and I mean everything depends upon Jesus.

So, my beloved, Jesus is encouraging us to pray and I have but revealed to you a few of his encouragements of the many found in Scripture. Take time to separate yourself from the world and focus on your relationship with God, pour out your heart as Jesus did all night to his Father, which is now your Father. God hears and he will answer.

Final Thought

I have a final thought, does verses 7 and 8, ⁷“**Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.**” ⁸“**For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.**” mean that everything a child of God asks for they receive? I believe the context of these verses answers the question.

The answer is, “NO”. My reasoning is this - if God did everything we asked then we would become the master of God and we are not God. God is infinite in his wisdom and we are not and therefore we do not have the wisdom to ask for what is always right and good. God is outside of time and history and knows all of the past, present and future. We on the other hand are very short sighted and do not always know what is right and good concerning all the events in our lives and how they may affect the people around us or history itself.

Jesus explains this in verses 9 and 10, “Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?” These illustrations prompt me to ask, “What is the child asks for a stone or serpent?” Does Jesus tell us God the Father will give these? No, I believe the answer is found in verse 11, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” God gives good things! The text points us away from thinking whatever one asks means they will always receive it. It is God’s mercy towards us that we do not receive everything we ask for.

Looking at the passage as a whole it says when we ask, seek and knock as broken sinful children who have been adopted by God, it is he who is trustworthy to hear us, love us and he will give us good things, and he is the only One who knows what is truly good. This of course tests our faith because we think we know what is best, but only God knows what is best. And as opposed to what the world would say, “We are not Gods!” We are not infinitely good, righteous, wise and loving. Therefore it is by God’s great mercy we do not receive everything we ask for.

My beloved, take Jesus at his word, for his word is forever true. How many blessings we forfeit because we do not ask, seek and knock. Blessings God wants to bestow on us and our families and our church. Lets take time now to get in small groups and spend a few minutes in prayer calling out to God from our broken hearts. Knowing God hears and cares and will answer and may this encourage your to spend more time, as Jesus did, with God your Father