

Introduction:

- A. I have just finished a good size book written by C.H. Spurgeon, a third of which are prayers to God.
 - 1. I don't know if these were written for the book; if they were private prayers; or if they were public prayers which had been recorded by stenographers.
 - 2. I have had another little book called *"The Pastor in Prayer,"* which contains 24 of prayers.
 - a. These were publically offered to the Lord in the morning services of the Metropolitan Tabernacle.
 - b. Some them are more than 10 minutes long.
 - c. And I have to admit that I don't enjoy reading them, because they convict me so severely.
- B. I believe that in the three verses we've just read, we have an example from the prayer life of Agur.
 - 1. It isn't from the heart of Solomon, because at least one of the circumstances wouldn't apply to the king.
 - 2. Why is this recorded here?
 - 3. Because Solomon appreciated the value of this prayer and what it might give to his children and subjects.
 - 4. This is a lesson from the Holy Spirit – who is the regulator of Godly prayer.
 - 5. *"The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."*
 - 6. What can we learn by considering Agur's prayer?

II. Going back to Sunday evening, we learn to pray as if we are dying.

- A. *"Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die."*
 - 1. First, don't be distracted by the verb *"required of thee."*
 - 2. In prayer, we had better not think that we can demand things from God.
 - 3. If we don't approach the Lord as beggars, then at the very least we come as children in need.
 - 4. The Hebrew word translated *"required"* is fairly common in the Old Testament.
 - a. It is rendered *"ask"* most frequently – 94 times.
 - b. *"Two things do I ASK of thee; deny me them not before I die."*
 - c. The next most frequent translation is *"enquire"* – 22 times.
 - d. It is rendered *"desire," "borrow," "request"* and *"beg"* more often than *"require."*
 - 5. In the original Hebrew there is a great deal more respect than the way we have it translated in our English Bible.
 - 6. *"Two things do I REQUEST and BEG of thee; deny me them not before I die."*
- B. It might be thought that Agur was dying, but there is no reason to demand that interpretation.
 - 1. I believe he was saying, *"Lord, between this moment and the moment of my death, please grant these requests."*
 - 2. As I tried to teach Sunday, there are benefits in looking at life as if we are all dying – and in truth we are.
 - 3. If we knew that our life will end tomorrow at 5:15 p.m. we might live the next 20 hours differently than if we think we have another 50 years on this earth.
 - 4. If we knew that we will be dead by tomorrow night, we'd make sure we took care of the really important things, not wasting our time on non-essentials.
 - 5. But we don't know the time of our death, so why not live as though we did.
 - 6. Agur prayed, *"Lord I don't have long, please grant to me these basic blessings."*
- C. *"Two things do I ask of thee; deny me them not before I die"* – just two things.
 - 1. Sometimes in our prayers we need to cast aside all the tiny specifics and dig down to the big basics.
 - 2. I don't mean *"make generalizations"* like *"Lord bless the missionaries and save the lost."*
 - 3. I mean – once in a while it is good to look for specific elemental needs, and beg the Lord to meet those needs.

III. First, Lord protect me from sin.

- A. *“Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me.”*
1. Some commentators suggest that Agur was asking God to forgive him for his vanities and lies.
 2. While I would not criticize the man for that, I don't think that was his request.
 3. It makes more sense to think of two other things.
- B. He prays, *“remove them far from me,”* which could mean *“deliver me from vain and deceitful people.”*
1. I still wonder what sort of responsibilities Agur had in the palace of the king.
 2. Do you suppose that people came to him, asking for his help in getting appointments with Solomon?
 3. How many times had he been approached by someone, pretending humility and a legitimate problem, and Agur made the introduction, only to find the man was a fraud and liar?
 4. *“Lord, I am so gullible. I am not skilled in recognizing the deceivers. Help me.”* We may not have positions of responsibility like Agur, but we are surrounded by self-seeking liars.
 - a. How many lies do we hear when listening to the news?
 - b. How far can we trust our representatives in government.
 - c. They are there in religion as well. Can we fully trust the Christian books we read?
 5. *“Remove far from me vanity and lies.”*
- C. While protection from sinful people is a possible explanation of these words, I think there is a better one.
1. Agur wasn't praying for salvation or forgiveness for vanity and lies, but he may have been requesting protection from such things and for sanctification.
 2. The sin nature can take the Christian in any number of evil directions – including murder and mayhem.
 3. But far more often we commit more *“innocuous”* sins related to pride and dishonesty.
 4. For example, we come to the house of God pretending to have had a great week in fellowship and service of the Saviour, but in truth we've given Him little thought and no service whatsoever.
 5. We quote scriptures and counsel our friends in the things of God, but we haven't spent more than a few minutes with the Lord all week.
 6. We are asked to lead the congregation in prayer, and we do our best to leave the impression that we are really close to Christ.
 7. We hope to deceive our neighbors, but more problematic, we are deceiving ourselves.
 8. Agur may have known that to be a problem in his life, and he knew how weak he was in fighting it, so he prayed for the Lord's blessings. *“Remove far from me vanity and lies.”*

IV. And then the man asked the Lord for moderation in His blessings.

- A. Notice first of all that Agur knew who was the source of the things he needed.
1. He acknowledged God's sovereignty.
 2. The One to whom he prayed dispenses wealth, poverty and even our daily food.
- B. God I ask that you *“give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me.”*
1. I have been reading a lot of material on prayer recently, and it has both blessed and convicted me.
 2. Several times in a variety of contexts, there have been statements and illustrations about God's great wealth and His desire to bless His saints.
 3. The suggestion or implication has been that we shouldn't be afraid to ask the Lord for really great blessings and spectacular miracles. And I will not take away from that idea.
- C. That friend of yours is dying, and it looks hopeless.
1. There is nothing wrong with beseeching God for a miraculous cure in his case.
 2. *“Lord, instantaneously, suck that disease out of his body, and glorify yourself in the eyes of those doctors.”*
 3. It is acceptable with God to ask for a 100% cure.
 4. But would you be satisfied with 50% – an extended life, but one with some suffering, some questions and a dependance upon the Lord for each successive day?

- D. You have a huge debt created through no fault of your own – perhaps an accident or a disease.
1. And you have been praying for the Lord to supply \$150,000 to pay off that debt, so that you can breathe freely and get back to serving God rather than your employer.
 2. But perhaps it would be better to trust the Lord for small, but constant, gifts which will keep the wolf at bay and which keep you in dependence upon Christ's grace.
 3. He who owns the cattle on a thousand hills could make you fabulously wealthy, but that may not be spiritually healthy.
 4. Perhaps you would be better praying for your daily bread than for the Powerball Jackpot.
 5. *"Give me neither poverty nor riches."*

- E. *"Feed me with food convenient for me"* – feed me with the food I need – not necessarily the food what I want.
1. God's manna was the perfect food; it supplied all the nutrition Israel needed.
 2. But eventually the people wanted more – and even less.
 3. I know people who seem to want nothing but sweets – but that is not food which is convenient for them.
 4. I know others who want only rich and heavy foods; and other who want junk.
 5. Agur wisely asked God for moderation, knowing that whatever he had came from the Lord.

V. Then in his prayer he added some arguments for his requests.

- A. *"Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."*
1. I said last Sunday that the Devil might be more pleased with us if we were wealthy rather than poor.
 2. The rich man may see himself as self-sufficient; the rich man may think he doesn't need a divine supplier.
 3. The Lord Jesus *"spoke a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?"*
 - a. He didn't thankfully pray about what to do with his wealth.
 - b. He didn't praise God for His bountiful grace.
 4. *"He said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*
 5. When things are going well in our lives, we may tend to discount the blessing of the Lord.
 6. There are temptations which are peculiar to wealthy people.
- B. Last Sunday I referred to a man who said Satan may prefer that we be rich rather than poor.
1. But that doesn't mean there are not temptations left specifically to poor people.
 2. The poor may resort to self-sufficiency just as easily as the wealthy.
 3. They may turn to theft, for example; they may resort to cheating; rather than patient trust in Jehovah.
 4. And they may grumble and complain about their poverty.
 5. Job's wife, in her sudden poverty, suggested that her husband *"take the name of God in vain" – "to curse God and die."*
 6. When anyone who professes to be a child of God, behaves in a manner unworthy of Christ, they besmirch the Name of their Saviour.
- C. So it was Agur's prayer that the Lord bless him with moderation.
1. *"Lord, protect me from the sins of both the wealthy and the poor."*
 2. *"May I live in dependence upon you for my daily bread rather than that check from my investment broker."*
- D. Again, what does this scripture say? What does this prayer include?