

LUKE 11

PERSEVERANCE IN PRAYER

When the disciples came to their Master with the request, “Lord, teach us to pray”; they had already, for some time, been with Christ in the school of prayer. They had already been impressed by that most valuable of object lessons – namely, the example of Christ Himself. If doubt ever arises in our minds as to the reality and efficacy of prayer; we only need to turn to the Gospel of Luke to be reminded that our Lord spent long hours in intercession, and that He prayed at every crisis in His life. Surely we shall not be misled if we follow in His steps!

This “Lord’s Prayer” (which is more fully recorded by Matthew) was not intended as a form which must be used rigidly on all occasions, but as an outline which should be the skeleton of all prayer – however free and spontaneous it may be. The first word, “Father,” suggests the childlike spirit in which all believers should draw near to God; and it is the grounds of much of the encouragement which Jesus gave His disciples in the verses which immediately follow this prayer. To encourage them in their petitions, Jesus told the parable of the man whose ceaseless and almost shameless asking secured for him the answer to his request for needed bread. However, contrary to the grudging disposition of the friend in the parable, Jesus implied that there is no such reluctance to be overcome on the part of God. Indeed, all who ask from Him will receive what they need. If they seek relief, He will grant it; and if they “knock,” even at “midnight,” He will open the door without delay! Then the Savior proceeded still further to encourage His disciples by again reminding His hearers that they were praying to their Father. Human parents reply to the requests of their children, and not by mocking them or giving them harmful gifts. They do not offer them a stone when bread is asked, or a serpent for a fish, or a scorpion instead of an egg. If then, with all our imperfections and limitations, we know how to give good gifts to our children; how much more can we expect our heavenly Father to give His Holy Spirit – as well as all other lesser gifts – to those who ask Him. Thus, again, we see that the blessed name of “Father” is the key to this lesson. If we approach Him as His beloved sons and daughters, it will be with confidence; but it will also be with submission, as we know that, whether He gives or withholds, His reply will be an expression of infinite mercy and of Fatherly love.

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Christ teaches His disciples to pray and encourages them to persevere – verses 1-13
- ❖ He casts out a devil and rebukes the blasphemy of the Pharisees – verses 14-26
- ❖ He speaks of true blessedness and happiness – verses 27-28
- ❖ He reproves the sign-seeking Jews and the hypocritical Pharisees – verses 29-54

The discourse that we find in verses 14-28 was given by Jesus in reply to the charge that He worked His miracles by Satanic power. Jesus had just cast out a demon. His enemies did not attempt to deny that a miracle had indeed been performed; but in order to discredit Him among the people, they explained the miracle on the grounds that Jesus must be in league with the devil. He replied by showing the absurdity of suggesting that the chief demon was casting out demons; for in that case, his power would be like a kingdom “divided against itself” – and so it would certainly be “brought to desolation.”

At this juncture, a woman who was in the audience interrupted with an expression of congratulation for Jesus’ mother (verses 27-28). In reply, the Savior acknowledged that His mother might rightly be called blessed, but He also made it clear that the woman had missed the real point. It was indeed a privilege for Mary to enjoy such a close natural kinship to Christ, but it is far better to possess that spiritual relationship which is sustained by faith and obedience to God’s Word!

In verses 29-36, we find Jesus directly answering the demand that He should compel His enemies to believe in Him by giving them “a sign from heaven.” He declared that such a sign would indeed be given in His resurrection from the dead. This miracle would be worked without any human intervention; it would be a direct act of God, and it would truly fulfill all the conditions of “a sign from heaven.” It would be the counterpart of the miraculous deliverance of Jonah from the belly of the great fish. However, the fact that these unbelieving Jews demanded such a sign was a mark of impertinence and insult; it reflected discredit upon the Divine character of the many miracles which Jesus had already performed. It failed to recognize the nature of His teachings, which surpassed the wisdom of Solomon and the startling message of Jonah. The eagerness of the heathen queen to hear, and the willingness of the idolatrous Ninevites to repent, were both a rebuke to the stubborn unbelief of the Jews who refused to accept the One Who is “greater than Solomon” and “greater than Jonah.”

Jesus also showed that these people’s guilty unbelief was not due to a lack of evidence, or to the need of a new “sign.” Rather, it was to be attributed to their indifference and their impenitence. Just as a lamp is designed to light a house, and just as the eye is intended to illuminate the body; so also, the soul that is right with God possesses the faculty of spiritual sight. But alas! This sight is dimmed and destroyed by sin. The inability of the Jews to believe was not due to a lack of “signs” and proofs, but to a lack of sight. No amount of light will help a blind person. However, all those who turn to Christ in repentance and faith and love will find him to be the Light of the world, and their whole souls will become radiant with Divine splendor!



In the midst of this conversation, a certain Pharisee invited Jesus to come and eat at his house. And here, the conflict between Jesus and His enemies reached its climax (verses 37-54). He rebuked their hypocrisy, and He pronounced six solemn woes upon them. And although Jesus' words were chiefly directed against the scribes and Pharisees of His day, His words are still full of warning for His followers in all ages; for it is sad but true that religion will always digress into becoming a matter of mere formalities and rituals, unless this attitude is prayerfully guarded against. Hypocrisy is often unconscious; and sometimes, its practice seems to be almost universal.

This Pharisee, whose heart was foul with sinful thoughts, wondered why Jesus had sat down to eat without first washing His hands according to the Jewish ritual. No such ceremony was actually required by the Law of God; rather, it was only a man-made tradition, upon which the Pharisees laid very great emphasis. But Jesus declared that to wash the body while the heart is impure is as absurd as cleaning the outside of a dirty cup or platter. He asserted that God, Who made the body, created the soul also; and He is more concerned with the latter than with the former. The Savior insisted that while it may indeed be good to wash the hands before eating, a better preparation for a meal would consist in filling the heart with love – which might be expressed (among other ways) in the giving of gifts to the poor. It was much more important that the Pharisee should take the hatred from his heart than that Jesus should wash His hands. Hypocrisy, however, is always concerned with external forms while disregarding realities. Therefore, Jesus pronounced a woe upon the Pharisees for tithing the small garden herbs, while neglecting justice toward human beings and love toward God – in other words, for observing some minute religious

rituals, while breaking all the Ten Commandments! Yet He did not condemn them for caring for these trifles; but rather, for neglecting things that were essential. "These ought ye to have done," He said, "and not to leave the other undone." Then He went on to rebuke the vanity of and the desire for prominence and public recognition, which is both a characteristic and a cloak of hypocrisy. He compared the evil influence of hypocrites to the defiling contact with a grave – upon which, one may unconsciously tread and thereby become ceremonially unclean. People are often not on their guard against those who make loud boasts of religion.

At this point, a lawyer interrupted Jesus with the statement that these severe denunciations seemed to include him and his associates also. Most of the lawyers were Pharisees, but they were the professional teachers and recognized leaders of the party; and so, by denouncing all Pharisees, Jesus seemed to include even these proud expounders of the Law. The Savior replied that religious teachers who are insincere, or who allow their religion to become a mere matter of ritualistic formality, are most of all to be rebuked! He pronounced three woes upon them. The first was because they extracted from the Law minute and burdensome requirements which they were not careful to observe themselves. It is a grievous fault for ministers and scholars to make religion a matter of weariness and distaste instead of a delight to the common people. Second, Jesus rebuked their heartless cruelty and fanaticism. Alas! Even those who claim to be teachers of religion may become guilty of having a share in killing the very prophets and Apostles of God. The hatred of Jesus that was shown by His enemies was like that of their forefathers, who had killed the Divine messengers of old. The blood of these martyrs, from the first to the last mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, was yet to be required of the nation; and those who rejected Jesus would partake in the judgment since they were partakers of the crime. Finally, the lawyers were also rebuked for keeping back the knowledge of God, which they did by their false interpretations of Scripture and their disregard of the real spiritual needs of the people. Such teachers of religion are like men who hold the key to a sacred Temple; they themselves will not enter in, and they keep back all who desire to do so. It is a very solemn responsibility to be a teacher of Divine truth; for if such a person proves to be a hypocrite, they shall merit these solemn woes which fell from the lips of Christ.

Very enraged were Jesus' hearers at these words. Hypocrites hate to be exposed! But wise men are glad to be warned, so that they may repent before it is too late. He Who spoke these bitter words of rebuke is still ready to pardon and purify, and to lead His followers in the paths of service and peace.

Lord, we repent of times when the awful state of Pharisaic blindness has been seen in Your own Church and even among ourselves. We pray for grace to sit at Your feet and to hear Your Word, so that through the blessed illumination of the Holy Spirit, our whole body may be full of light, with no part dark! Amen.