

February 7, 2016

BREAD AND STONES

Matthew 7:7-13

The Balloon Race...

The question the balloonist asked was the wrong question. Instead of asking, "Where am I?" he should have asked, "Where am I going?"

Where are we going??? Sometimes, the answer to that question can be determined, at least to some degree, by asking, "*Where have we been?*" Part of Christian maturity comes in asking the right questions. And, asking for the right things. But, Jesus has told us, (He didn't just suggest it), He told us to "Ask." "*Ask and it will be given you.*" (Matthew 7:7) **ASK** – Make your requests known. Jesus doesn't give a method for prayer. He gives, instead, a model prayer... The Lord's Prayer. The Disciples would have known how to pray simply by virtue of having had the Book of Psalms, portions of which were shared regularly in the synagogues and in the Temple. When the Disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He responded with an exact example of *what* to pray. And so we have the Lord's Prayer.

ASK – Not just once, and then assuming that if you did not get what you wanted, God doesn't care, or, doesn't listen... Keep asking. Jesus told the story of an unjust judge. "*He told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God, nor regarded people; and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Vindicate me against my adversary.' For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor regard people, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.' And the Lord said, 'Hear what the unrighteous judge says? And will not God vindicate His elect, who cry to Him day and night? Will God delay long over them? I tell you, God will vindicate them speedily...Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will He find faith on earth?'*" (Luke 18:1-8)

Now, if Jesus wants us to be persistent with God in our prayers, shouldn't we be persistent with one another when we think we're not being heard, or, given regard? It's hard to listen and really hear all the serious requests of everyone, so, we need to keep asking. And...we need to keep praying. Paul said in his Letter to the Philippians, "*In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" (4:6-7)

SEEK – Consider our Lord's Prayer. After the Prayer expresses a relationship to God – Father – there is an expression of the supplicant's seeking for 1) God's name to be hallowed (or kept holy); 2) for God's Kingdom to come; 3) for God's will to be done; 4) that God would provide our daily food; 5) that God would forgive us; and 6) that God would guard us in our times of trial, or, temptation. When we pray for God to forgive us, though, it is intended to happen "*as we forgive others.*" You can't really ask God to forgive you if you are not forgiving. It would be like asking a carpenter to remodel your house with materials from a neighbor's home. The reality of God's amazing grace, though, is that our Carpenter builds our house with materials from His own house. Nonetheless, I believe every prayer ultimately seeks to glorify God, because when we are asking for certain blessings for ourselves, or, for others, we are acknowledging God's power and graciousness in being able to provide.

KNOCK – When we are seeking something, sometimes it is hard to find. We need to be persistent. Luke tells us that Jesus told a little parable about a persistent neighbor in Chapter 11:5-8. The parable seems to indicate that, in some way, the door may seem closed. So we need to knock. We have

an expression: *Opportunity knocks*. And we are to take advantage of the opportunities that come our way. We, if we miss the opportunity to help a neighbor, may be resisting the will of God. Sometimes, we are the knockers, and sometimes, we are on the inside...being bothered by the opportunity to serve our neighbors! The point of this parable is that God gives graciously, not like the annoyed friend, or, like the unjust judge, but more like a father or mother who is willing to give their children the things they need....And.... even more so. The questions Jesus asks in the verses that follow his admonition to ask, seek, and knock, are rhetorical. That means that no one needs to think of an answer, because the answer is obvious. “*If your child asks for bread, would you give them a stone?*” “*Or, if they ask for a fish, will you give them a serpent?*” The answer is obvious. No parent in their right mind would give their children the opposite of what they’re asking for...would they? Think for a moment, what do we give our children? “*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?*”

Back up a second, though, and ask those rhetorical questions in a different way: If your child asks for stones, and you know they need bread, do you still give them the stones? Or, if your child asks for serpents, and you know they need fish, do you still give them the serpents? A new point can be made here – what if people are praying/asking for something that is outside the will of God, the Father? We often ask God to do things that may not fit God’s plans for us. And that may be why, sometimes, it seems as if your prayers and requests are not answered... at least, not the way we want them answered. Sometimes, like a good parent, the answer might be ‘no’ or ‘wait.’ If God gave us everything we asked for, every time, we would be spoiled, we would end up taking God for granted (even more than we already do), and we would assume a magical quality to our prayers. We need to understand that prayer may not always get us what we want. But it will make us what God wants. And God wants His children to talk to Him, to make our requests known, to seek Him out. Persistently!

And realize too, that Jesus, when He was hungry after fasting for forty days, and Satan tempted Him to make bread out of stones, said, “*Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God!*” What is the bread, the daily bread we seek? What is the bread we want to serve our children? And you, are you hungry? What kind of bread do you want? My prayer is that you will all hunger for the Word of God! It is my greatest hunger. I pray you will be hungry too!