**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**LUKE-042**. **HOW TO PRAY by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. And it came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught His disciples. 2. And He said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. 3. Give us day by day our daily bread. 4. 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. 5. 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; 6. For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? 7. 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. 8. 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. 9. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. 10. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. 11. 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? 12. Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 13. 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!"*

*Luke 11:1-13*

Christ's praying fired the disciples with desire to pray like Him. There must have been something of absorption and blessedness in His communion with the Father which struck them with awe and longing, and which they would fain repeat. Do our prayers move any to taste the devotion and joy which breathe through them? But low conceptions mingled with high desires in their request. They think that if He will give them a form, that will be enough; and they wish to be as well off as John's disciples, whose relation to their master seems to them parallel with theirs to Jesus.

Our Lord's answer meets and transcends their wish. He does give them a model prayer, and He adds encouragements to pray which inculcate confidence and persistence. The passage, then, falls into two parts--the pattern prayer (vs. 2-4), and the spirit of prayer as enforced by some encouragements (vs. 5-13). The material is so rich that we can but gather the surface wealth. Deep mines must lie unexplored here.

**I. The pattern of prayer.**

We call it the Lord's Prayer, but it is so only in the sense that He gives it. It is our prayer for our use. His own prayers remain unrecorded, except those in the upper room and at Gethsemane. This is the type to which His servantsprayers are to be conformed. After this manner pray ye, whether in these words or not. And the repetition of the words is often far enough away from catching their spirit. To suppose that our Lord simply met the discipleswish by giving them a form misconceives the genius of His work. He gave something much better; namely, a pattern, the spirit of which we are to diffuse through all our petitions,

Two salient features of the prayer bring out the two great characteristics of all true Christian prayer. First, we note the invocation. It is addressed to the Father. Our prayers are, then, after the pattern only when they are the free, unembarrassed, confident, and utterly frank whispers of a child to its father. Confidence and love should wing the darts which are to reach heaven. That name, thoroughly realised, banishes fear and self-will, and inspires submission and aspiration. To cry, Abba, Father, is the essence of all prayer. Nothing more is needed.

The broad lesson drawn from the order of requests is the second point to be noticed. If we have the child's spirit, we shall put the Father's honour first, and absolutely subordinate our own interests to it. So the first half of the prayer, like the first half of the Decalogue, deals with God's name and its glory. Alas! it is hard even for His child to keep this order. Natural self-regard must be cast out by love, if we are thus to pray. How few of us have reached that height, not in mere words, but in unspoken desires!

The order of the several petitions in the first half of the prayer is significant. God's name (that is, His revealed character) being hallowed (that is, recognised as what it is), separate from all limitation and creatural imperfection, and yet near in love as a Father is, the coming of His kingdom will follow; for where He is known and honoured for what He is He will reign, and men, if they rightly knew Him, would fall before Him and serve Him. The hallowing of His name is the only foundation for His kingdom among us, and all knowledge of Him which does not lead to submission to His rule is false or incomplete.

The outward, visible establishment of God's kingdom in human society follows individual acquaintance with His name. The doing of God's will is the sign of His kingdom having come. The ocean is blue, like the sky which it mirrors. Earth will be like heaven.

The second half of the prayer returns to personal interests; but God's child has many brethren, and so His prayer is, not for meand my, but for usand ours. Our first need, if we start from the surface and go inwards, is for the maintenance of bodily life. So the petition for bread has precedence, not as being most, but least, important. We are to recognise God's hand in blessing our daily toil. We are to limit our desires to necessaries, and to leave the future in His hands. Is this the mannerafter which Christians pray for perishable good? Where would anxious care or eager rushing after wealth be, if it were?

A deeper need, the chief in regard to the inner man, is deliverance from sin, in its two aspects of guilt and power. So the next petition is for pardon. Sin incurs debt. Forgiveness is the remission of penalty, but the penalty is not merely external punishment. The true penalty is separation from God, and His forgiveness is His loving on, undisturbed by sin. If we truly call God Father, the image of His mercifulness will be formed in us; and unless we are forgiving, we shall certainly lose the consciousness of being forgiven, and bind our sins on our backs in all their weight. God's children need always to pray after this manner, for sin is not entirely conquered.

Pardon is meant to lead on to holiness. Hence the next clause in effect prays for sanctification. Knowing our own weakness, we may well ask not to be placed in circumstances where the inducements to sin would be strong, even while we know that we may grow thereby, if we resist. The shortened form of the prayer in Luke, according to the Revised Version, omits deliver us from evil; but that clause is necessary to complete the idea. Whether we read evilor the evil one, the clause refers to us as tempted, and, as it were, in the grip of an enemy too strong for us. God alone can extricate us from the mouth of the lion. He will, if we ask Him. The only evil is to sin away our consciousness of sonship and to cling to the sin which separates us from God.

**II. A type of prayer is not all that we need.**

The spirit in which we pray is still more important. So Jesus goes on to enjoin two things chiefly; namely, persistence and filial confidence. He presents to us a parable with its application (vs. 5-10), and the germ of a parable with its (vs. 11-13). Observe that these two parts deal with encouragements to confidence drawn, first, from our own experience in asking, and, second, with encouragements drawn from our own experience in giving. In the former we learn from the man who will not take no, and so at last gets yes; in the latter, from the Father who will certainly give His child what he asks.

In the parable two points are to be specially noted--the persistent suppliant pleads not for himself so much as for the hungry traveller, and the man addressed gives without any kindliness, from the mere wish to be left at peace. As to both points, an a fortiori argument is implied. If a man can so persevere when pleading for another, how much more should we do so when asking for ourselves! And if persistence has such power with selfish men, how much more shall it avail with Him who slumbers not nor sleeps, and to whom we can never come at an inopportune moment, and who will give us because we are His friends, and He ours! The very ugliness of character ascribed to the owner of the loaves, selfish in his enjoyment of his bed, in his refusal to turn out on an errand of neighbourliness, and in his final giving, thus serves as a foil to the character of Him to whom our prayers are addressed.

The application of the parable lies in verses 9 and 10. The efforts enjoined are in an ascending scale, and askand knockallude to the parable. To seekis more than to ask, for it includes active exertion; and for want of seeking by conduct appropriate to our prayers, we often ask in vain. If we pray for temporal blessings, and then fold our hands, and sit with our mouths open for them to drop into, we shall not get them. If we ask for higher goods, and rise from our knees to live worldly lives, we shall get them as little. Knocking is more than either, for it implies a continuous hammering on the door, like Peter's when he stood in the morning twilight at Mary's gate. Asking and seeking must be continuous if they are to be rewarded.

Verse 10 grounds the promise of verse 9 on experience. It is he who asks that gets. In men's giving it is not universally true that petitions are answered, nor that gifts are not given unasked. Nor is it true about God's lower gifts, which are often bestowed on the unthankful, and not seldom refused to His children. But it is universally true in regard to His highest gifts, which are never withheld from the earnest asker who adds to his prayers fitting conduct, and prays always without fainting, and which are not and cannot be given unless desire for them opens the heart for their reception, and faith in God assures him who prays that he cannot ask in vain.

The germ of a parable with its application (vs. 11-13) draws encouragement from our own experience in giving. It guards against misconceptions of God which might arise from the former parable, and comes back to the first word of the Lord's Prayer as itself the guarantee of every true desire of His child being heard and met. Bread, eggs, and fish are staple articles of food. In each case something similar in appearance, but useless or hurtful, is contrasted with the thing asked by the child. The round loaves of the East are not unlike rounded, wave-washed stones, water-serpents are fishlike, and the oval body of a quiescent scorpion is similar to an egg. Fathers do not play tricks with their hungry children. Though we are all sinful, parental love survives, and makes a father wise enough to know what will nourish and what would poison his child.

Alas! that is only partially true, for many a parent has not a father's heart, and is neither impelled by love to give good things to, nor to withhold evil ones from, his child. But it is true with sufficient frequency to warrant the great a fortiori argument which Jesus bases on it. Our heavenly Father's love, the archetype of all parental affection, is tainted by no evil and darkened by no ignorance. He loves perfectly and wisely, therefore He cannot but give what His child needs.

But the child often mistakes, and thinks that stones are bread, serpents fish, and scorpions eggs. So God often has to deny the letter of our petitions, in order not to give us poison. Luke's version of the closing promise, in which the Holy Spiritstands instead of Matthew's good things, sets the whole matter in the true light; for that Spirit brings with Him all real good, and, while many of our desires have, for our own sakes, to be denied, we shall never hold up empty hands and have to let them fall still empty, if we desire that great encyclopediacal gift which our loving Father waits to bestow. It cannot be given without our petition, it will never be withheld from our petition.