

Upside-Down Kingdom: As Much As He Needs

(Luke 11:5-13)

I. Introduction

- A. **Old Joke:** Guy joins a monastery; only allowed only 2 words every 5 years.
1. After 5 years, he says, “*Food bad.*” Then “*Bed hard.*” And “*Room cold.*”
 - a. Finally says, “*I quit.*” Head monk, “*All you’ve done here is complain!*”
 - b. Does that describe how some pray? Few words in few years, then quit?
 2. Guy struggles and a friend suggests prayer, “*I tried it once; it didn’t work*”
 - a. Pretty typical of how we approach things like exercise and diet.
 - 1) We do it because we know we should, but give up pretty quickly
 - 2) Settle into a go-thru-motions routine (*Like drink SlimFast with burger!*)
 - b. I wonder how many Christians have all but given up on prayer
- B. Ron Lavin tells of a prayer service for their associate minister who was sick.
1. Church came to pray; Lucille, custodian who’s not a member, was there.
 - a. Several men prayed heartfelt, but rather long-winded and formal prayers
 - b. Lucille decided to take her turn praying— it was neither long nor formal
God this is Lucille. You know me and I know you. We need you to heal Bob and do it pronto. We need him. He needs restored health so that he can continue to love people and show people faith. God, I know that you can heal him, and I believe you will. In Jesus name, amen
 - c. Later commented, “*You Lutherans are little mild in your proper prayers*”
 2. Hopefully she was commenting on liturgical style (formal vs informal)
 - a. Style isn’t important; Informal (“*I just wanna*”) prayer isn’t more holy
 - b. Lucille may be on to something; we may have gotten too mild in prayer
 - c. We haven’t given up praying, but maybe too mild, casual or nonchalant
- C. In our parable today from **Luke 11**, Jesus teaches prayer with sense of urgency
1. Parable follows Luke’s version of what we generally call “*Lord’s Prayer*”
 - a. In **Matthew**, the Lord’s Prayer is part of the Sermon on the Mount
 - b. **Context:** Don’t pray like Pharisees (*attention*) or the pagans (*babbling*)
 2. **Luke**’s version is Jesus answering disciples request, “*Teach us to pray*”
 - a. It’s a much shorter (*38^{vs} 52 words*) though very similar to Matthew.
 - b. Luke also includes a parable that stresses urgency and persistence.
 - c. That parable is our text for this morning (Reading: **Luke 11:5-8**)

II. As Much As He Needs: The Parable

- A. Hospitality was something that was extremely valued by people in the culture
1. It's common in many cultures for even poor to go overboard in hospitality
 - a. Family who lived in one room flat in Kiev served us a full 4-course meal
 - b. We realized later she used month's ration of sugar to make us a cake!
 - c. Good ol' days, people competed to see who fed the preacher fried chicken
 2. Unexpected guests in Jesus' day posed a problem for stress on hospitality
 - a. They had no refrigerators or Wal-Mart-- where did they get extra food?
 - b. To provide for company, you were expected borrowed from neighbors
 - 1) Missionary to Middle East speaks of common practice of borrowing
 - 2) Neighbors would borrow dishes and food, then invite him for meal!
 - c. In the parable, a man comes to his neighbor at midnight to borrow bread
 - 1) Bread was not only food, it was also fork or spoon they used to eat
 - 2) He can't serve a meal without bread; so he asks the neighbor
 3. Jesus' point packs a bit of incredulity, "*Can you imagine the neighbor ...*"
 - a. They couldn't imagine a neighbor doing that— it would be *scandalous*
 - b. It would have been one's civic and religious duty to provide hospitality
 - 1) **Inconvenient**: Midnight was late. Door was locked. Kids tucked in.
 - 2) So what? The neighbor is going to get up; it's just what you do
 - c. Why does he get his bread? Not just friendship, but because he asked!
- B. The point is perhaps slightly different depending on your translation
1. The NIV says, "because of the man's boldness." NASB has "*persistence*."
 - a. NET strengthens it "*sheer persistence*." NLT has "*shameless persistence*"
 - b. KJV has "*because of his importunity*" (Webster: "*Troublesomely urgent*")
 2. Why such different translations? Word here (ἀναίδεια) is hard to translate
 - a. It is "*persistence*" but with dash of *audacity*, what we might call "*nerve*"
 - 1) It like someone calls 4-5 times in middle of night, "*Did I wake you?*"
 - 2) That is persistence all right, but they also have a lot of nerve!
 - b. The man gets up and gets bread because neighbor is **bold enough** to ask
 - c. But he is bold enough to continue to ask until the neighbor gets up

3. **Context:** Parable continues Jesus' answer, "*Lord, teach us to pray*" (**11:1**)
 - a. He gives Lord's Prayer as FRAMEWORK—praise, petition, penitence
 - 1) This model is not meant as liturgy to be repeated in time of stress
 - 2) Plane is bounced around in storm, so someone says Lord's prayer?
 - 3) Probably a better prayer would be, "*Lord, don't let this plane crash!*"
 - b. Lord's Prayer is *prayer framework*, our parable is our prayer **ATTITUDE**
 - c. Prayer is to be neither mild nor proper—Jesus is teaching is to be **BOLD**
- C. The "*Parable of the Friend at Midnight*" teaches boldness in **two ways**
1. **PERSISTENCE:** Neighbor boldly keeps knocking until someone answers
 - a. Paul says "*pray continually*" (**1 Thess 5:17**) or "*without ceasing*" (KJV)
 - b. That is Jesus point in similar "*Parable of Persistent Widow*" (**Luke 18:1**)
 - 1) Widow is ignored until her persistence wears down the unjust judge
 - 2) Not teaching us **about God**—He is somehow unwilling or reluctant
 - 3) It is teaching us **about prayer**—we are to pray and pray and pray
 2. **AUDACIOUS:** Neighbor is "*shamelessly persistent*" (NLT) **Took nerve!**
 - a. It takes nerve to be "*knock-knock-knockin on heaven's door*" (Bob Dylan)
 - 1) Suppose you call Washington to ask President for favor? **Audacious!**
 - 2) And to approach the Creator of Universe for something? **Audacious**
 - b. But we come boldly before the throne because of Jesus (**Heb 10:19**, NLT)
 3. Jesus tells us to come with persistence before God—*likes to hear from us!*

III. As Much As He Needs: Two More Points

- A. **First**, Jesus reinforces point on persistence—ask, seek, knock (**Lk 11:9-10**)
 1. This "*ask, seek and knock*" language come from our parable—neighbor
 - a. Verb tense seems to indicate a continuing action, "*keep on asking*" (NLT)
 - b. Jesus says God answers prayer—if we keep on asking, seeking, knocking
 2. Does that mean that God is contractually obligated to answer every prayer?
 - a. Is prayer a cosmic vending machine? Is God like a genie in a bottle?
 - b. Remember, the parable promises the neighbor "*as much as he needs*"
 - 1) Jesus never promises everything that we want, but as much as need
 - 2) Prayer is for "*daily bread,*" not "*Lord, won't you buy me Mercedes*"
 3. Dad grew up in depression, but had plenty to eat—"*You've had plenty*"

- B. **Second**, we must have faith that God knows how to answer us (**Luke 11:11-13**)
1. Jesus' affirmation is that God knows how to bless his children
 - a. God is not a sleepy neighbor who doesn't want to answer the door
 - b. God is not an unrighteous judge who can't be bothered with our concerns
 2. God is a loving father who knows how to give us good gifts
 - a. We won't give us a snake if we ask for a fish—He knows how to answer
 - b. **Question:** But what if we ask for a snake? Something not good for us?
 - 1) God's promise here is to give one who asks "*as much as he needs*"
 - 2) Our job is to keep asking, and trust that God knows what is best

IV. Conclusion

- A. Kierkegaard: "*Prayer doesn't change God, but it changes he who prays*"
1. I believe the second part is true—prayer changes the one who prays
 - a. Prayer is a way to prioritize, to work through feelings, pour out heart
 - b. Prayer can be very much like my "counseling" when people come to me
 - 1) They talk for awhile and I listen, they say, "*Wow, I feel a lot better*"
 - 2) I didn't do anything (get what pay for), expressing was good
 - c. The act of praying is important for us, but the power goes much deeper
 2. I disagree with Kierkegaard; I think that prayer changes the changeless God
 - a. When we assail the gates of heaven, God answers and opens them
 - b. God hears us when we are "*knock, knock knockin' on heaven's door*"
 3. A better quote, "*God changes things, and prayer changes God*" (Atchley)
- B. Kingdom of God is totally different from that of men-- *upside down kingdom*
1. The kings and nobles of the kingdoms of men are distant from subjects
 - a. Remember Xerxes and Esther; queen could not go in without summons
 - b. Call up White House and ask to speak to president... or the head janitor
 2. The King of Heaven gives his subjects full access to His throne all the time
 - a. He promises that He will listen to his subjects and act on their requests
 - b. Helmut Thielicke says this of prayer in God's Upside-Down Kingdom
God is doing nothing less than offering to his praying church a part in his government
 3. Jesus ends "*Parable of Persistent Widow*" with these words (**Luke 18:8**)
 - a. When Jesus comes, will he find His church persisting in prayer?
 - b. We will persist in being that praying church knocking on heaven's door