

"Lord, Teach Us to Pray"

All who read the Scriptures will readily remember that Jesus was a man of prayer. On the occasion when the above question or request, was made, Jesus had prayed to the Father, and when he ceased the desire was from one of his disciples that he would instruct them in the proper manner or form of speech they should use in their petitions to God.

Although Jesus had indicated in his wonderful teachings on the mount (Matt. 6:9-13) the form of approach and supplication that would be acceptable, perhaps among the many other important lessons this might be but vaguely remembered.

Also, Jesus would be desirous that they should *exhibit a desire*, hence he prayed for them that they might give evidence that the desire for this spiritual food existed in them before he gave it to them. This is in accord with his teaching in that matchless address (Matt. 5:6)—

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

Doubtless we are all aware that many prayers are daily being offered which are at variance with scriptural teaching. Vain repetitions and empty phrases not only offered wrongly, but not even addressed to God the Father and Creator—

"Who made heaven and earth and the sea and all things that are therein" (Acts 14:15).

They are offered to Jesus whom they address as God, also to the "Virgin Mary" whom they ignorantly suppose is in heaven, and to a host of "saints" who in their imagination are still living, whereas, in truth—

"The dead know not anything" (Eccl. 9:5).

As true followers of the Lord, let us endeavor to present our petitions in a manner that will be acceptable to our Heavenly Father, and address them to Him.

The English words "pray" and "prayer" are translated from various Hebrew and Greek words having such meanings as—*ask, supplicate, to bend or bow down, petition, intercession, pouring out, beseeching, etc.*

James tells us (1:17) that—

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights."

Hence we should "ask of God," as he advises in v. 5.

It will be profitable to consider some of the notable prayers of the "holy men of old," that we may ascertain the manner of approach and form of phraseology they chose in their supplications. In Gen. 18:27 we read—

"And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes. Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous; wilt Thou destroy all the city for lack of five?"

Do we always approach God in fear and reverence, with a full consciousness of our insignificance and His exalted majesty? Let us ever guard against the slightest presumption or carelessness or forgetfulness of His greatness and holiness. It is so easy to slip into this habit,

especially in giving thanks for our meals. We must always approach in the frame of mind of David as he gazed at the immensity of the night heavens:

"When I consider the heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained—**what is man**, that Thou art mindful of him?" (Psa. 8:3-4).

Again James tells us (5:16) that the—

"Effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

We see this well illustrated in Moses, the "man of God"—

"When Moses prayed to the Lord, the fire was quenched."

The fire had been sent as a punishment upon Israel (Dt. 9:26)—

"I prayed therefore unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, destroy not Thy people and Thine inheritance which Thou hast redeemed through Thy greatness, which Thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand."

The prayer offered by Solomon on the occasion of the dedication of the Temple at Jerusalem is a beautiful one and worthy of much study. How happy Israel—and Solomon himself—would have been if they had maintained the spirit of this wonderful prayer (1 Kings 8:23-43)—

"Lord God of Israel, there is no god like Thee, in heaven above, or in earth beneath, Who keepest covenant and mercy with Thy servants that walk before Thee with all their heart.

"The heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee.

"What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all Thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house:

"Then hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling-place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart Thou knowest: for Thou, even Thou only, knowest the hearts of the children of men.

when "Moreover, concerning a stranger, that cometh out of a far country for Thy Name's sake, he shall come and pray toward this house, hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling-place, and do according to all the stranger calleth to Thee for; that all people of the earth may know Thy Name, to fear Thee."

And he concludes with the majestic words (2 Chron. 6:41)—

"Now therefore arise, O Lord God, into Thy resting place, Thou, and the ark of Thy strength: let Thy priests be clothed with salvation, and let Thy saints rejoice in goodness."

Deep humility and godly reverence is manifested by the great king of Israel. How well and worthily he began!

We turn now to the righteous Daniel, who is classed with Noah and Job as the three outstandingly righteous men of their times, as indicated by the words of God to Ezekiel (14:14)—

"Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it (the land of Israel), they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God."

The sins of Israel had reached such a point that even the "effectual, fervent prayers" of these righteous men could not have helped them. From Dan. 2:18 we learn how Daniel advised his companions (when the decrees of Nebuchadnezzar went forth) to pray, urging them—

". . . that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret, that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon."

And as a result, we are told, "The secret was revealed to Daniel." We call attention especially to his reaction. Often we pray earnestly for something in a time of stress and danger, and then as soon as the danger passes we go our way and forget to be thankful. But Daniel exclaimed (vs. 20-23)—

"Blessed be the Name of God for ever and ever. I thank Thee and praise Thee, O Thou God of my fathers, Who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of Thee."

In ch. 9 we find an outstanding and instructive prayer which shows us the deep humility and reverence which should characterize God's servants in approaching the Great Creator in prayer and supplication. We note first the intenseness of Daniel's desire and entreaty (v. 3)—

"I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes."

Then his address to God, recognizing His greatness, and the certainty of His Word, and the class to whom alone He looks with mercy and favor (v. 4)—

"O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love Him, and to them that keep His commandments."

Then see how in love for his people he classes himself with the wicked Israelites and prays for them. We are reminded of how Jesus was made one with his erring people, that he might mediate for them, and bring God's blessing upon them. See how many times throughout this prayer he says "we," "our," and "us," in speaking of Israel's failures and transgressions—

"We have sinned and committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled. . . Neither have we hearkened . . . O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto Thee, but unto us confusion of faces" (vs. 5-7).

What a model prayer for Israel and all God's servants in all ages! This was at the end of the pronounced 70 years of punishment, at the beginning of which Ezekiel was told that even Daniel's prayers would be of no avail to avert the punishment. But now the long-awaited time of promised regathering was at hand, and Daniel prays earnestly for its fulfilment.

We turn from the prayers of Daniel, the "man greatly beloved," to Jesus himself, the "beloved Son in whom God was well pleased." Prayer was his great strength and comfort. On occasions he "continued *all night* in prayer to God."

Where do we find any support for the teaching that we may pray to any but *God alone*? Truly Jesus did tell his disciples that they should "Ask *in my Name*," and God would hear—

it "Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father **in my Name**, He will give you.
"Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my Name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:23-24).

There is much meaning to "asking in Jesus' Name." We must be "in his Name," and our prayers must be in harmony with the great purpose that is centered "*in his Name*."

In the model prayer which Jesus gave his disciples in answer to a request from one of them, there are many things we may learn. First, it is worth noting that Jesus *set the example* by praying before them, and then allowed scope for the disciples to ask that they might receive the spiritual instruction. This is in harmony with his teaching—

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

God delights in the prayers of the righteous, even though His purpose is established and He knows all the needs of His people before they ask Him. He delights in their prayers, for it indicates their interest and desire toward Him, and He is pleased to let them be "workers together with Him." Therefore we should never neglect prayer. "Pray without ceasing" is the Spirit's injunction. Our whole life must be a constant prayer.

The prayers of all true saints should be modelled after the pattern of this one known as "The Lord's Prayer."

"*Our Father*"— we realize that God is our Father in a special sense, apart from the genealogical descent from Adam who in one sense was the "son of God" (Luke 3:38), for as Paul says of the faithful few who are "in Christ" by baptism (Gal. 3:26):

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

In Rom. 8:15-16 Paul speaks of our privileged position—

"For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father, the Spirit itself bearing witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."

"*Which art in heaven*" is a phrase which reminds us the Father is a real Being located in a dwelling-place, which, although far removed from the earth, is readily accessible by prayers which ascend like sweet-smelling incense to the throne of grace, through our High Priest and Mediator "who ever-liveth to make intercession," for—

"There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"
(1 Tim. 2:5).

Arising from this thought, Paul continues (v. 8)—

"I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

There is much food for thought in the expression "*holy hands*."

"*Hallowed*"—or, as the Hebrew word implies, *Set apart* "be Thy Name." With what awe and reverence we should always approach and call upon that holy Name! "*Name*" implies many things—identity, authority, power, honor, majesty, purpose, allegiance, protection, security, manifestation—all the scriptural thoughts bound up with the great purpose arise from the contemplation of the Name of God—

"The Name of the God of Jacob defend thee" (Psa. 20:1).

"I will write upon him the Name of my God" (Rev. 3:21).

"Save me, O God, by Thy Name" (Psa. 54:1).

"*Thy Kingdom come*." The all-important thing comes first; requests for our own needs are always secondary in importance. Do we realize this in our prayers?

For "*Lead us not into temptation*," the Diaglott has, "Abandon us not to trial," which would seem to be the intended meaning, in accord with other Scripture, as 1 Cor. 10:13—

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

James (4:3) rebuked some who—

". . . ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

This should be a deterrent to us from asking in a similar selfish, thoughtless manner, for that is not the purpose of prayer—just to petition for a satisfaction of our desires. Few men pray except when they want something, but the children of God know that prayer has a much higher and more beautiful purpose—even *praise and worship and adoration and gratitude for the glory of the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ*.

We know from Paul's request for the brethren's prayers that it is our duty to pray for our brethren; also for the sick and afflicted, for "The prayer of faith shall save the sick." That is, the combined prayers of faithful brethren and sisters will be helpful if offered in reverential faith, and if it is in harmony with God's will and all-seeing love to grant their request.

The example of Elijah's strong faith in prayer is cited for our profitable contemplation. When trials or temptations assail us, Jesus' words to Peter and the other disciples should warn us to:

"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit (or mind spiritually enlightened) indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41).

Jesus' gentle words of warning and exhortation to his disciples when he returned to them from his terrible vigil in Gethsemane—"Why sleep ye, rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation"—seem a fitting watchword for all his saints. Let us keep them ever before our minds.

And may we, dear brethren and sisters, follow the example our Lord and Master so often has given us by precept and example, and "*Pray always, lifting up holy hands*" to our Heavenly Father, "without wrath and doubting."

—H. A. S.