

Petitionary Prayer

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning, which is in Luke's Gospel, but back in Luke chapter 11. Luke chapter 11, verses 1 to 13.

Luke 11, then at verse 1. Now, Jesus was praying in a certain place. And when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.

And he said to them, when you pray, say, Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation. And he said to them, which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey and I have nothing to set before him.

And his friend will answer him from within, do not bother me, the door is now shut and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything. I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence, he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

[1 : 31] And I tell you, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks receives. And the one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish, give him a serpent?

Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

Amen. May God bless us. These are his words. Well, you all know where to turn.

Please turn to Luke chapter 11. It's a great joy to be with you again. And there's a great passage for us to study.

[2 : 40] Luke chapter 11 and verse 2 will get us going. No, sorry, verse 1.

It shows you that I am stupid, so you better start praying straight away. I've got the long verse right at the beginning. Verse 1. Get that at the back. Luke 11, verse 1.

Now, Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray.

I love that. They see him praying. They are deeply stirred by it. They realize they can't do it. They want to do it.

They admire what it means for him, the strength it gives to them. And they say, Lord, please teach us to do what you do. Which reminds me that Christianity is caught just as much as it's taught.

[3 : 42] It's caught and taught. And they learned to pray here because they saw what it meant to their Lord. Right. Let me start by saying who should pay special attention to the talk this morning.

Certain people have got to be listening carefully. First, fathers. Just say yes if you're a father, then I'll know that some of you are here. Any fathers?

Yeah, right. Good. It's Father's Day, and there's a special message for you today. Then, if you had the privilege of a mother or father, parents, would you say yes, that I know you're here?

Well, you ought to be listening very carefully today. And those who know that they have a father in heaven, they should be listening today. Is that any of you? Oh, good.

Well, if that is you, if any of those are you, you should be listening to this passage because it's a word from God for you. My second preliminary comment is one that I always make after the Student Servants of the Word conference, and that is to thank you very sincerely.

[4 : 55] I always love coming for this conference. It's a treat. In case you don't know, we've been having a conference this week for assistant ministers and others and students, and it's been a wonderful time.

Of course, we've loved having the new Corn Hill headquarters. They are stunning, and if you haven't seen them, I'm sure you will soon see them. We were wonderfully provided for. It seems that this church knows you need to be fed well. I won't say that we eat fed too well. I discovered that when I started my group, my workshop, they were eating sweets. I said, there are no sweets here until you produce something good. So we had to put away the sweet sweets until they had done their work properly. Anyhow, thank you. It was lovely to come, and we had a wonderful week.

And I hope that conference will flourish and go on. Right, our text is Luke 11, 1 to 13, and our theme, The Wonderful Privilege of Having Our Father in Heaven Who Cares For Us.

[5 : 59] Incidentally, if Britain insists on being a secular state, and it rather looks like that, doesn't it? I think we may need to say to our countrymen, you've got no claim on this famous prayer, the Lord's Prayer, at all.

Stop using it on great occasions. Don't use it in your school assemblies. Don't dream of using it at the graveside. It's not your prayer.

It belongs to the family, the Christian family. Well, I'm not going to say that to them. I don't suppose you are either. But it's awful cheek, isn't it, to use this prayer if it doesn't belong to you.

It belongs to the Christian family. Now first, and this may seem rather strange to you, I want to look at what is here from a pagan point of view.

This only has come home to me in the last few weeks, that when Jesus is speaking to his disciples at the beginning, he knows that they come out of a situation when they have been amongst pagans.

[7 : 07] Actually, that's true of most of their history, isn't it? They were first of all in Egypt, then they were for many long years in exile, and now they're under the Roman domination.

And so they've deeply been influenced, as I think we are by our increasingly secular state. They're deeply influenced by pagan thinking, attitudes, actions, words, education.

They breathe all the air of their unbelieving contemporaries. Only this week I was going down Borough High Street, near where I live, and there were about four buses all lined up, breathing out diesel.

We'd had a warning on our radio saying that some streets were quite dangerous to breathe in. And I suddenly found that I was breathing this filthy air. I nearly choked.

Well, if you live in a pagan land, you breathe in that filthy air. And so I think Jesus is aware that his disciples are breathing in the air of unbelief and paganism, and he needs to put this right.

[8 : 16] Now, I want to tell you something about the pagan. The pagan has no reassurance of a father in heaven. Fear, not faith, is his attitude to life.

Fear of the unknown. Fear of fate. Fear of illness and death without hope. Fear that things will go wrong rather than right.

Fear of death. So I'm asking the question before we really get underway. How does the secular man, the person you meet every day, how do they find the reassurance that we have through being able to pray to our Heavenly Father?

Well, the answer is that they have their own scriptures. And I've been discovering one of their scriptures only yesterday. It is the stars or the horoscope.

Now, I want you to be, I want to appeal to you not to tell your minister that I read my horoscope yesterday. I haven't done this, I think, the whole of my life, but I fell yesterday.

[9 : 25] I ought to tell you straight away that it was a very respectable paper that I read it from, the Daily Telegraph. So that surely puts it all right, doesn't it? And I discovered that this is the alternative gospel for the secular man.

It's the scriptures for the secularist. And I thought I'd like to read to you the good news and the reassurance that this particular gospel of the horoscope gives people.

Some read it every day, some once a week, and some once a month. Cancer, June 22nd to July 23rd.

Good luck is all around you. With dynamic Mars until early August, success for you is guaranteed. Leo, July the 24th to August the 23rd.

With Uranus, the planet of creative growth and change, aligned with lucky Jupiter, you should be on a winning streak this week. Berger, this is me.

[10:32] August 24th to September 23rd. Blue skies lie ahead. Isn't that good news? Made all the difference to me yesterday to know that.

September 24th to October 23rd. Is this you? With easygoing, lucky Jupiter beaming down on your close friendships, all is well. Scorpio, you can take full advantage of the run of luck the stars have in store for you now.

Lucky you. Sagittarius. Any doubts you may have had about a certain situation, ease this week. When your ruler, mark this, your ruler. Oh, no, Heavenly Father. When your ruler Jupiter is due to boost your confidence, you can leave recent problems in the past.

Oh, good. Aquarius. Your love life is under lucky, easygoing stars from now until mid-August. Not beyond that, but that's good news, isn't it?

[11:47] Pisgys. The planetary pattern will boost your confidence and put you in a very strong career position. Mark that.

Those of you who are at work. One more. March 21st to April 20th. Is that you? Well, with Jupiter, the Lord of luck, on your side until mid-August, you should have the flair and confidence to bring about a major breakthrough in the weeks to come.

Unfortunately, I read the small print for this gospel, and in very tiny print at the bottom it says, this service is for entertainment purposes only.

Oh, dear, what all that done. They had to put that down, you see, because if they promised you good luck in business next week and it wasn't so, you could sue them. So then when in court they would say, oh, this is only a game.

Only a game. But that's the scriptures many people go by, isn't it, every week. Now, I tell you this because it seemed to me, studying this passage with my team this week, we started it all this week, by the way, when I wasn't allowing them to have any sweets.

[13:02] But after a bit they did better, and then I did allow it to them. It seems to me that Jesus is contrasting that kind of rubbish that you just heard with real reassurance.

It's not a game. And that he's trying to root out of his disciples the remnants of paganism, which is still in their hearts, and it's still in yours too, in mine.

Deep down, the infection of secularism, of paganism, of unbelief is in all of us. And Jesus here, I think, is trying to root it out. So look with me.

We'll look at a couple of these rather startling little stories he tells, because that's the purpose of them. Look at verse 11 to 13. I think the point of this rather odd little story is to say we're not pagans.

We have a heavenly Father. Now, here's the question for Father's Day and you fathers. Will you please pay attention, fathers? What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent?

[14:07] Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? Which fathers of you would do that? Here's the situation. Let's put it in modern terms. The two children, we'll call them Hamish and Heather, coming up to Christmas, or it might be a birthday, and Mother sends Dad down to the market.

She says, I think what we'll do with Hamish is to give him, oh yes, he's just lost his goldfish. They die every fortnight. And we must get one back. Will you go and get another goldfish for him?

And Heather, well, she loves those little painted eggs. See if you can get one of those, and I'll put that at the bottom of her stocking. So Dad goes down to the market.

And he comes back, and Mother says, what have you got? And he says, well, I've got a little tin here. And in it, the owner of the pet store says, there's a tiny little snake.

It's got a very poisonous sting. And when Hamish opens the tin, takes the little snake out, that'll serve him right.

[15:19] Well, says Mother, what have you got for her? Well, I couldn't find an egg, but I've got a very nice egg-shaped thing. And here it is, and you open it down, and inside is a scorpion.

And there she goes to the bottom of her stocking and opens it out and pulls it out. She'll get an awful sting. She won't forget that for a long time. Question. Question.

Which father in this great hall would behave like that? No volunteers. But don't you see, that's what pagans fear, that if you actually bring things to your pagan gods, they won't give you good things.

They'll harm you. That's the whole point about paganism. You dare not, unless you keep in with them, unless you favor them, you dare not ask them for any favors.

I think Jesus wants to root out pagan thinking, because he says, why aren't you coming and asking? Do you distrust your Heavenly Father? Do you dare not bring to him the things that really matter in your life?

[16:26] Yes, it's all very well to bring the ordinary things, but do you bring everything to him? Strange little illustration, isn't it?

Don't be a pagan. As a Christian, you're different. And then this very strange little episode or story in verse 5. Will you look at it? I won't read it again.

But I think what is happening here is that somebody arrives at midnight, and we're living in a world without premier inns and without B&Bs; and without cafes that are open all night. And that's why hospitality meant so much in the ancient world.

You had to be ready to take people in and feed them. So this man comes on the doorstep and his host has to find food for him. So he goes off to another friend and he knocks on his door and the other friend is not willing.

Don't bother me. The door is now shut. My children are with me in bed. I cannot give you anything. I tell you, he will get up and give him anything because of his friend, yet because of his impudence he will get up.

[17:30] Actually, that's a very good translation. In the old translation, it was persistence. And that led to a complete misunderstanding of the story. If you're a pagan, you have to be shameless with your gods.

You have to bribe them. You have to go on battering at the door because they're unwilling. But God isn't unwilling. The Heavenly Father isn't unwilling. Look at verse 9 and 10.

I tell you, ask and it will be given you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you. He doesn't say knock, but he won't listen until you go on knocking and knocking and knocking. It's a mark of the pagan, Baal prophets, to go on all day praying, imagining that for the many words they'll be heard.

I think one or two of you are studying Greek at school. Well, you look at your Greek gods. They weren't interested in anybody but themselves. You had to flatter them. You had to feed them. They weren't feeding you. So it's not persistence that's called for, but trust that this Father, they may not give you what you particularly want at that moment, has heard you from the beginning and longs to give you good things.

[18:50] So let's not be pagans. Now let's look at this wonderful passage briefly from a Christian point of view. As God's children, we are to ask.

He is more anxious to give than we to pray. And I want to give you three straightforward truths that are here, and I hope they will be a blessing to you again. I've been relearning them, and they've been a great blessing to me.

First, asking, that is petitionary prayer, is of the essence of Christian prayer.

Yes, I know we're taught to praise God, to thank God, to confess our sins, to adore God, but the central fact of Christian prayer is asking. I was shocked to read a theological dictionary that said prayer is not asking but offering.

No, no, no, no. You don't have to offer something in order to get God to answer you. If you want proof, look at the great prayer of verse 2 and 3 and 4.

[20:04] What do you notice about all those five sentences? Look at them. Each one is a request. Father, please hallowed be your name.

It's right in the mud in our country today. No one cares about your name. They just use it as a swear word. Father, please bring your kingdom in.

Nobody's listening. We want so many people to hear about you. Father, please give us our daily bread. Notice it's plural, our daily bread. You may be all right today, but your brother or sister is not. We pray for them. Please forgive us our sins. We're conscious every day we need to pray that. So we ask you to keep us clean.

And we ask you to forgive everyone who's indebted to us. Please deal with our relationships with our fellow brothers and sisters. And Lord, please lead us not into temptation and evil.

[21:04] We're not very strong. We can't stand up to much. Please don't lead us into danger.

Notice that in the pattern prayer, the great prayer, the Lord's prayer, the family prayer, every single

sentence is asking.

Don't be ashamed to ask. Ask. Every one of them is a request. First then, asking petitionary prayer is of the very essence of Christian prayer.

Secondly, asking petitionary prayer, and listen to this, is the privilege of the Christian. Because the non-Christian, the unbeliever, the secularist, well, this prayer means nothing to them, does it?

Let's start at the bottom this time. Lead us not into temptation. Well, I think the secular person often wants to be led into temptation. This isn't a prayer for them.

Forgive us our sins. Well, they haven't begun to do that, have they? They don't want that. That's not their problem. Give us each day our daily bread. Well, we'll fight for that ourselves, but we're not going to depend upon God, and we're certainly not going to pray for others.

[22 : 14] This is a competitive world. Your kingdom come, that's of no interest to the secularist. Father, how it be your name, that's of no interest to the secularist.

By the way, are you careful in your use of God's name? The secularist, the unbeliever, the pagan, the man in the street, doesn't care at all. So that's my second statement.

I think it's a very important one. This prayer can only be used by the Christian. It's a family prayer for family members. Third, asking petitionary prayer is dependent, of course, on having a father who will answer.

Who cares for us? Who cares about our fierce temptations? Who cares about your material needs or those of a friend of yours at the moment up against it?

Who cares about the kingdom in this world? Who cares about his name supremely? I want to give you my testimony.

[23 : 26] I've only spoken on this passage once previously. It was a few months ago to a women's meeting in the church I belong to called Women on Wednesday. It's a lovely meeting. All ages are there from young mothers from babies and elderly grandmothers and so on.

And we looked at this passage and the person who got most out of the talk, you'll be surprised, was the speaker. And I realized I'd not been shameless.

I'd not been asking my Heavenly Father about things as I ought. And so I've started a little way of doing this every day.

Not my morning prayer and Bible study. An extra time. And I have a little book and I'm learning to ask.

And one of the things I'm learning to ask is I'm getting to know the Heavenly Father better. Because you notice that what he actually gives me as I ask him.

[24 : 29] Did you see that in verse 13? Well, he does give me many gifts. But above all, he gives me himself, the Holy Spirit, who is going to make me more like him.

It's remarkable, that, isn't it? The greatest thing God has to give is himself. And as you've learned to ask him for things, what he's doing is working in you that ability to know him better, talk to him more sensibly, ask him for things that really matter, and become more like him.

That's what prayer is really about. And it's been a remarkable time. And I want to give this testimony to you because I hope some of you will do the same.

Of course, you learn very quickly that your father is not a slot machine. He's not your servant. You're asking for his will as much as your will, in fact, more so.

But you will find he's very generous. Sometimes, of course, he says no. Sometimes you have to wait. But again and again, as you look back, a week or a fortnight or a month later, you see wonderful ways in which your Heavenly Father has answered your prayer.

[25 : 41] I ask, I put at the top of my page, Heavenly Father, I ask. Because I love your name, I love your kingdom, I have your need every day.

You see what it is? I'm becoming more and more dependent on him. Because that's what petitionary prayer is all about. It means I've ceased to be dependent on myself. I've ceased to run my own Christian life.

I've come to him every day and asked him to give me what he wants to give me and to give it for other people too, so that we may all become more like our Heavenly Father.

If you then who are evil, like that, know how to give good gifts to your children, yes, that's true, isn't it? Think of that criminal in prison. And his wife is visiting this afternoon.

And he says, the children's birthdays this week, I've saved this money, will you give them a wonderful day? Yes, even an evil man will do that. How much more will the Heavenly Father give

the Holy Spirit and with him all things to those who ask him?

[26 : 50] Amen. Amen. Let's pray for a moment. Heavenly Father, please drive out of our hearts every shred of paganism.

Grant that we may come into your presence, not as the unbeliever, skeptical and doubting, but believing that you have good gifts to bestow upon us.

And may we learn not only to pray for ourselves and to ask boldly, but to ask boldly for others in need. May this church become increasingly an interceding church for this desperate world around us.

Heavenly Father, you are a generous God, and many of us here have proved it. Increase that generosity, we pray, as we come to you in our helplessness, our weakness, and our joy.

And we ask it all through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.