
JESUS AND PRAYER

BY MICHAEL CARD

Everyone knows that Luke is the gospel that most emphasized the prayer life of Jesus. Nothing happens in Luke without prayer; Jesus prays before He calls the 12 (6:12), He often goes to the wilderness and prays all night long (5:16). Only Luke makes the point that the expulsion from the Temple was so that the Holy Place could be reestablished as a place of prayer (19:46). Only Luke tells us that the Transfiguration occurred as or perhaps because Jesus was praying (9:28). Jesus is also constantly teaching about prayer, devoting two parables exclusively to the topic.

Another important perspective in Luke is Jesus' relationship with the Pharisees. Owing to the fact that Luke had been a companion of Paul, the Pharisee, you might expect an extra measure of understanding when it comes to this important segment of Jewish life and culture and that is exactly what you find. Luke portrays Jesus eating in the home of at least two Pharisees. And when we come to the passion narratives, the Pharisees are not the major participants that the other gospels portray them as being.

This is not to say there is no tension between the two. Jesus breaks their oral Sabbath codes every chance he gets and receives, not so much their indignation but tense questions. (see 6:2) Jesus does not act like them. He does not teach like them. And apparently, He does not pray like them.

After all the emphasis on prayer in the gospel of Luke, we do not actually get to hear Jesus pray until chapter 11. It has been a long, long wait and Luke understands that we are

anxious, like the disciples, to hear Jesus pray. And so they ask, "Lord, teach us to pray..."

From the Pharisees we might expect an impressive prayer, filled with illusions to the Torah and to the rabbinic traditions. But what we expect from Jesus, we almost never get.

Instead, Luke gives us a prayer (the shorter form) that can be spoken in a single breath. A child can learn to pray by means of this prayer as well as a PhD.

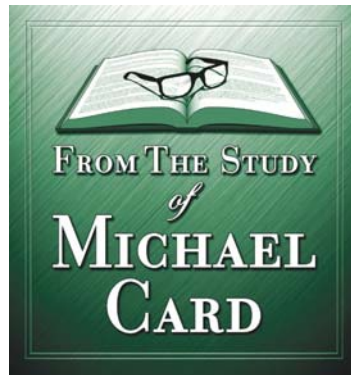
Jesus' emphasis is not so much on what we say, on "getting it right." No, He focuses instead, after the prayer, on the confidence and certainty we can have in God, who as our Father, knows what we need. Who knows how to give good gifts. He is the One who finds the seekers, who answers the askers, who opens the door of His life to those who knock.

And what is His great gift, according to Jesus? What is the present He chooses to give to His children?

"...how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him."¹

Jesus teaches us that what we ask for in prayer is rarely what we need. We usually ask for provision, when the God who knows how to give good gifts is ready to give us His Presence through the Holy Spirit.

That is what that simple, childlike, bottomless prayer of Jesus is really about. It is not what we expect, but He never is. ✨



¹*Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. 1997, c1996 (electronic ed.) (Lk 11:13). Wheaton: Tyndale House.