

## THE EMBARRASSED HOST

"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; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?" Luke 11:5-6.

While Christ was praying in a certain place, His disciples were standing near by and observing Him. Silently and reverently they looked and listened. They observed in their Master while He prayed a strange separation from the world, a conscious nearness to God, a delight in the Father's presence, and a familiarity in communion with Him which seemed to them like heaven upon earth. When He ceased praying they did not steal away, nor did they try to excuse their presence there, but one of the disciples made the earnest request, "Lord, teach us to pray." When they saw Him praying, they felt that their prayers were unworthy of the name. As they looked at their Master communing with His Father, there was something which told them that He was really praying. They wanted to learn to pray as the Lord Jesus prayed. So, when He had ceased they turned to Him, feeling as if they had never prayed at all, and cried, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."

It was then that our Lord supplied that prayer which has been linked with His name through all these centuries. Having taught them by praying in their presence, He proceeded to teach them as one teaches children, namely, by putting words in their mouths.

After our Lord had repeated the best-known of all His prayers, He told them this story of the embarrassed host. Heavenly truth never found similar expression than in the parable which Christ spoke on that occasion. He followed the parable with the assurance which has comforted the hearts of innumerable millions of people through all of these intervening centuries. He said, "Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Is not the supreme message of this story this great truth that prayer is not a form but a force? Ask and you receive; seek and you find; knock and the door opens.

Christ gave His followers a specific lesson on importunity and perseverance in praying. How simple, and yet how profound, is that wonderfully human and homely story! It has in it a touch of both comedy and tragedy. There was a man who had an unexpected guest. Since this guest was unexpected, no provision had been made for his entertainment. The weariness and the hunger of the guest are something that every one who had traveled has experienced. We can well imagine the embarrassment of the host over an empty pantry at such a time. Anyone who has ever played the part of host can sense the presence of embarrassment throughout the story. This embarrassment was occasioned by two things--the claims of friendship and the empty pantry. How great are the claims of friendship! And this was a friend in need. He had trudged the lengthening miles step by step encouraged by the hope that at the end of his journey he would find both rest and refreshment.

To make matters worse this unexpected guest had arrived just before midnight, when there was no possibility of providing food by going to market. Doubtless, it had been his intention to arrive before sunset, but he had lost his way and was delayed considerably. This good-natured and hospitable man never made any preparation for an emergency. He was one of those people who simply live from hand to mouth. But, to have sent his guest to bed without his supper would have been a terrible breach of the laws of hospitality. Yet, how to avoid doing so appeared to be an impossibility.

This man was embarrassed exceedingly. His friend, weary with travel, had come to him for refreshment and rest. He would have been glad to have helped him if he could, but there was no bread in the house, and besides the time was inopportune. He was sympathetic, but powerless. He was helpless in the light of the needs of his friend, and his helplessness was all the greater because it was in the night.

Suddenly a happy thought struck him. "I have a friend. I will go to him and tell him my situation; I am sure that he will help me." Willing to undergo any amount of trouble rather than seem to be lacking in hospitality, he determined to try to borrow the necessary supply of bread even at that late hour. So he hurried out into the dark and went to the door of his neighbor and friend, and knocked as the traveler had already done at his own door. That seemed to be the only recourse which the embarrassed host had. The stores were closed, so he could not buy, but he could ask. He resorted to the only course that was open to him. This happy-go-lucky, hospitable, but thriftless host faced a twofold difficulty--how to awaken the neighbor who was asleep, and how to induce him to get up after he was awakened and give him what he wanted.

To the repeated knocks upon the door of the house of his friend, one can imagine a sleepy voice growled from within, "What do you want?" "Three loaves of bread," was the prompt reply. "Lend me three loaves for immediate use. A friend of mine has come to my house and I have nothing to set before him." The voice from within said, "Don't bother me! Don't pester me!" The word in the original indicates impatience or annoyance, such as one experiences who is awakened from sound sleep. He continued, "My children are in bed. I have had a hard time getting them to sleep. You have come too late." Thus the man pleaded to be left alone, for he did not want to get up. That sounded discouraging enough, but the man outside the door was determined and refused to be discouraged. Finally the man arose, opened the door and gave him the loaves which he had requested.

Christ uses this parable to stress the point: "Keep on asking and it shall be given to you. Keep on seeking and you shall find. Keep on knocking and it shall be opened unto you." This is not a picture of how God answers prayer, but how man should offer prayer. Note various things about the embarrassed host.

1. He had a sense of need.  
He told his need right out. He made no apology for his condition. He said, "I have nothing." A sense of real need is indispensable in prayer. This man had come face to face with a situation with which he could not cope in his own strength. His need was of such a nature that he had to appeal to somebody. His request was born of a sense of need. Prayer stems from a heaven-born sense of need.
2. He had a friend to whom he could go.  
His sense of need was not enough. He had a friend and he believed that he could and would help him. So, he went to him. Thank God, we also have a Friend.

"What a Friend we have in Jesus,  
All our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer!"

Thus we sing of our great Friend in the time of need, yet so often we fail to go to Him, and so the hymn continues,

"O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer!"

This man went to his friend despite the time. While a well established prayer life finds a fixed time of prayer, it is also true that Spirit-led prayer is not a matter of the clock, but it comes into its own as an emergency measure. The errand was made despite the darkness. How often the Christian seeks the throne of grace when he sees not one ray of light to guide him, but he must grope his way by faith in the blackness of midnight. He went despite the closed door. And, after all, why is a door closed

except that we may knock thereon? When the door is opened the time for knocking has ceased and the time for crossing the threshold has come.

How did this embarrassed host go about presenting his petition?

(1) He went to his friend directly.

He did not ask any go-between to intercede for him. He did not speak to his friend through a mediator. He went to him personally. Christ teaches most emphatically the right of every individual to approach God for himself.

(2) He was specific in his request.

He told his friend frankly and plainly what he asked at his hands. "Give me three loaves," was his plea. He knew exactly what he wanted and he asked for it. This element of directness is a condition of successful prayer.

(3) He was persistent in his asking.

He was persistent because he was desperately in earnest. He felt that he simply must have bread. Then, too, he was confident that his friend was not going to disappoint him. In this term "importunity" we have a word that is not used anywhere else in the New Testament. It might better be rendered "shamelessness," although that it is not quite the meaning. The shamelessness that is meant is that which consists in continuing to knock after receiving an apparently final refusal. Think of it! The petitioner pays no heed to the excuses advanced and to the denial given. "Nerve" somewhat expresses the idea. This man had lost all sense of personal shame occasioned by his position.

(4) He was unselfish in his asking.

When the man left his house to seek for food, it was not his own necessity that urged him. He was not in want personally. He had eaten his supper and had gone to sleep. What drove him forth was the unexpected demand on his resources. It was a claim upon his hospitality that sent him forth and made him such a suppliant that to refuse him was practically an impossibility. It was another's need which made him ask.

We are not only driven to prayer by our own needs, but also by the needs of others. We are sometimes driven to God by personal distress. Trouble has come, or sickness, or anxiety; or we are sorely tempted, or in great perplexity. In such seasons how much one must miss if he does not turn to God in prayer.

In every relationship of life large and various demands are made upon us. There are those who trust us; those who love us, and those whose welfare hangs upon our guidance. Who are we, in our own poor resources, to meet and to satisfy these social claims? It is then that we are driven to God. We come to Him because others need our help.

What then is prayer in the light of this earthly story with such a blessed meaning? Prayer is need finding a voice. Prayer is embarrassment seeking relief. Prayer is friend in search of friend. Prayer is a quest in the darkness of midnight. Prayer is insistence in the name of another. Prayer is expecting and receiving all things whatsoever we need to meet the demand when Christ our Friend calls upon us.

Oh, what a privilege is this coming to God in the name of Christ! Do you feel unworthy to approach God, embarrassed by your spiritual bankruptcy? Go to Him in Christ's name. He has promised to hear you for His sake. Whatever your needs, His grace has a sufficient supply. Will you accept His salvation now?