

PRAYERS THAT GOD ANSWERS

Luke 18:1-14.

LESSON 97 -- Primary Course

MEMORY VERSE: “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you”
(James 4:8).

Learning from Jesus

No doubt many children who love Jesus have often wished that they could have lived when Jesus was upon earth. Others perhaps have imagined that they were sitting upon the shore of the beautiful Sea of Galilee, listening as Jesus talked to them. Still others find themselves, in their thoughts, sitting at the table with Jesus, as some had the privilege of doing many, many years ago. We have learned in other lessons that Jesus often told the people short stories, which taught them important lessons. These short stories are called parables, and are pictures of things on earth that tell of heavenly things.

The Judge and the Widow

In today's lessons we have two short parables told by Jesus, which teach us some important lessons about prayer. The first one is about a judge – a man who held an office in a city. When people do wrong, like driving automobiles too fast or breaking some other law, they must go before a judge who makes them pay a certain amount of money. Sometimes the judge causes people to be sent to jail. The judge in this story was unkind and cruel. He did not love Jesus and made it very hard for the people whom he served. In the same city lived a widow. One day she went to the judge and asked him to help her. Someone was causing trouble for her and she needed help. At first the judge refused to help her. Then, upon second thought, he said to himself that although he did not fear God nor care about pleasing the people, yet since the widow was troubling him so much he would help her. He thought: If I do not help her, she will keep coming and troubling me until I get tired of it. He might as well have spoken it aloud. The Lord knew his thoughts and said, “Hear what the unjust judge saith.” The Lord knew that the heart of the judge was wicked, and knew what he was thinking. The Lord knows our thoughts today; He knows the good ones and the bad ones. He even knows before we speak what is in our mind and heart.

Pray and Believe

Jesus is not like the cruel judge, but He will answer our prayers soon, if we pray with faith. How thankful we should be that we have a kind, loving Father in Heaven who answers our prayers and gives us the good things in life that we need. But He wants us to pray until we receive an answer. The judge gave the widow what she asked, because he knew she would keep troubling him until he did. She had great faith. When Jesus sees that we have faith that will not take “no” for an answer, He will also give us the things we ask for, if they are good for us.

The Answer

When we pray, it is well for us to ask Jesus to give us what we want if it is good for us to have it. Once a little child prayed for something she wanted very, very much. But Jesus did not let her have it, because He knew it would not be good for her. Someone who did not believe in prayer said to her, “You prayed, but Jesus did not answer your prayer, did He?” “Yes, He did,” said the child; “He said, ‘No.’”

A great man of God named Elijah became very unhappy one day. He went into a lonely place and sat down under a tree. As he sat there that day he began praying to God that he might die. But God had more work for Elijah to do, so the prayer that he might die was not answered. God sent an angel with some food to Elijah. He had a good rest and ate the food, which the angel brought him. Then Elijah went on his journey again and was able to finish the work God gave him to do. God knew what was best for Elijah; He also knows what is best for us today.

The Pharisee and the Publican

The other parable in the lesson is about two men who went to the Temple, their church, to pray. They were both sinners and needed to be saved, but the difference in these two men was that one of them knew that he needed Jesus in his heart, and the other one thought he was all right without having Jesus in his heart.

Shall we imagine that we, too, go to the church that day? As we enter the building we cannot help hearing the Pharisee as he loudly prays, or pretends to pray. Perhaps he wants everyone there to hear what he says. He does not seem to be really praying to God at all, but is just standing there talking to himself.

This is what he says, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are. . . . I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.” Do you think that is the right way to pray? Should we tell God all the good things we are doing for Him when we pray? We decide that the Pharisee is proud of himself and what he is doing for God.

Where is the other man whom we saw come to the Temple? Far off, all by himself he stands. His head is bowed. He is sorry because he has sinned. He smites his breast and cries out “God be merciful to me a sinner.” At once we see his face light up with the joy and peace of Heaven! He lifts his head and thanks God for being merciful unto him. He is saved; new hope and life come into his soul. He humbled himself before God; he did not tell God how good he was; he knew he was a sinner and needed to be saved. God did save him then and there. He leaves the Temple that day and goes home, a happy man. Even the angels in Heaven rejoice because another sinner is saved.

But the prayers of the one who prayed “with himself” do not reach Heaven at all. He also goes home; but there is no change in his heart and life. There is no joy in his soul. He is the same self-righteous Pharisee that he was when he went to church.

Pride and Humility

When Jesus had finished telling this “story” He pointed out the lesson that He wanted us to learn: everyone who lifts himself up and tells how good he is, shall be brought down; and he that humbles himself shall be lifted up. It is well for us to remember that Jesus loves everyone: the high, the low, the rich, and the poor. One is not a bit better than another in God’s sight. One child may have a prettier face than another; one child may be crippled; one may wear better clothes than another; but Jesus does not look at the outside – He looks down into the heart. He sees whether the heart is white and clean or whether there are spots of sin there. Let us ask Jesus to help us keep our heart humble and free from sin.

QUESTIONS

1. Why did the judge decide to help the widow? Luke 18:5.
2. Who heard what the judge said to himself? Luke 18:6.
3. What kind of prayer did the Pharisee pray? Luke 18:11, 12.
4. What did the publican say to God? Luke 18:13.
5. Whose prayer was answered? Luke 18:14.