

## **“Who’s There?”**

### **Luke 11:1-13**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“Knock, knock. Who’s there?” This age-old joke has plagued society for years on end. Children have annoyed their parents, friends, and siblings for generations with the many different variations of it. There’s an interrupting cow, an orange and a banana, a forgetful penguin, and so many more. I can hear the collective eye-roll cascading through the pews as you endure these awful dad jokes, so I’ll move on. In our text this morning, Jesus is not telling knock-knock jokes or cracking one-liners to get a laugh. He is teaching His disciples how to pray, specifically how to beseech the Father for their needs. After teaching them what we call The Lord’s Prayer, Jesus tells them a parable about a persistent friend in need. The Lord then follows that with another parable about a father who gives good gifts to his children, and then finishes things off explaining the true gift of the Holy Spirit from the heavenly Father to His children. So, why does the Father give us the good gift of the Holy Spirit? Is it because we know all the right words to pray, or our persistence finally pays off? I think the better question is, who is the one doing the asking, seeking, and knocking?

This sinful world and most of the modern church will tell you that the answer to that question is YOU. A great number of contemporary preachers will use this morning’s Gospel lesson to teach their people that if they pray the right way and want something bad enough, then they will receive it. Essentially, they teach the people in their church that if they pray hard enough for a million dollars, and really, really want it, it will show up in their bank account. Want a healing miracle for yourself or a loved one? Believe hard enough, and ask enough times, and it will be delivered. If they get it, then they did a good job. If they don’t, then they didn’t try hard enough, or their faith was too weak. We live in a society, both inside and outside of the church, that desperately wants everything to be about you as an individual, and not the truth of the Gospel. In the face of these work-mongers, we must ask, "How much is enough? How do I know if I am using the right words of prayer language? How many times is the right number before God will start answering my prayer?" Their answer is simply, you’ll know you’ve done it right because you will get what you ask for.

They really do work exceptionally hard to keep the focus on you and your actions. Just as in most cases, they fail to read the entirety of the passage and take verse 9 out of context. They zero in on our text and say, “Jesus says ask, and you’ll get

whatever you want; look, and you'll find whatever you seek, knock and every door will open for you. It is on you to make things happen in your faith life, and if you make them happen in your faith life, then you'll get good things in your earthly life." What an incredible perversion of a text that should bring comfort and hope for the life to come. We don't pray simply to create faith and good things in our life. Prayer is a result of the Holy Spirit working faith in our hearts. We pray because we have already received the greatest gift from the Father in the person of His Son, and through Him, the Holy Spirit. And because we have received that gift, we pray that His will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

I can vividly recall a leadership conference in Dallas a few years ago, when the company I worked for brought in a motivational speaker to talk to our group. Amidst the mindless, cliché platitudes and motivational one-liners, one thing really stood out to me. It was all about what you can do for yourself. The idea that if you dream big enough, you'll reach a higher level, and if you aren't setting your bar high above the norm, you will always fail. You have to make it happen and your ambition has to exceed all those around you at any cost. Self-reliant success and failure feeds arrogance and contempt that can destroy your faith, and make you continually turn away from God and the reality of His gifts.

And this self-reliance and individualism is nothing more than the devil's lies and deceit. In a world increasingly full of Satan's influence and lies, it's easy for you to succumb to the whims of society. His entire goal is to isolate and attack you everywhere you go and in everything you do. When you succeed, he wants you to think it's because you did it. You worked hard and made the effort with no credit belonging to anyone but yourself. Simultaneously, when you fail, he wants you to believe it's God's fault, and that you couldn't possibly have done more. All the while he eats at your conscience making you wonder if you didn't make a good effort, or didn't do all the right things to make it happen. And when you fail, your sinful flesh blames God and asks, "Why? Why would God let this happen to me?" But when you succeed, you are quick to give yourself the kudos, and leave God out of it.

When you are told to rely on nothing but yourself, and trust no one, it's easy to feel like there's nowhere to go when you fail. There are many examples of this in Scripture, where the devil and this sinful world beat people down and make them feel like God just isn't there and that they are all alone. Take Job, for example. In Job 12:4 and verse 6, Job cries out, "...I, who called out to God and he answered me, a just and blameless man, am a laughingstock...The tents of robbers are at peace and those who

provoke God are secure...” Job is in one of those “Why me?” moments. And so, in the midst of his cries and pleas to God for help and explanation, Satan swoops in and sends men Job considers friends to accuse him of wrong-doing. Their intent: to drive him away from what he knows to be the answer and into a self-reliant retribution theology. They say he must have done something wrong, so he has to atone for his error. Job knows the answer is only to continue to call upon the name of the Lord, yet Satan wants nothing more than for him to give it up and “take matters into his own hands” to relieve him from his suffering. He wants Job to think it is in his own power to change the outcome. Similarly, the devil wants you to think that when you pray to God, and it seems like He doesn’t answer you, that He must not be there, and that you are all alone, suffering in this lost, sinful world because of what you have or have not done.

But the story of Job continues and closes in a way that makes Satan cringe and writhe under the weight of God’s victory. In chapter 13:4, Job says to his friend, Zophar, “But I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue my case with God.” This sounds, to me, oddly familiar to Jesus’ rebuke of Peter in Matthew 16:23 when He says, “Get behind me Satan! You are a hindrance to Me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” Job’s prayer, long as it may be, focuses always on the fact that God is the one that will bring deliverance, and it is God’s power alone that will do it, not any act of his own. No thing of man will bring an end to his suffering. Only the things of God can do that. Even over 1000 years before Christ was born, Job prays for deliverance in Christ’s name when he says in chapter 19:25, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth.”

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus tells us what we should be asking of the Father, and it isn’t a million dollars or a healing miracle. It is the Holy Spirit and His gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation. And we receive that gift from the Father because of His good and gracious will on behalf of His beloved Son. Modern day preachers want to focus more on being self-help gurus that can make your life on earth better and more enjoyable, rather than pointing people to the answer in Jesus. They want you to believe that it is only through yourself that you might find the Father, and by your own doing welcome Him and His gifts into your heart. But the Lord made it abundantly clear that if you seek the Father, there is only one way to get there. In John 14:6, “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”

As people with the knowledge of that fact, we go before the Father and beseech Him for forgiveness on behalf of his beloved Son. And why does the Father graciously

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give us His Holy Spirit when we ask? For the answer to that, we go back to the question I posed at the beginning of the sermon, "Who's there?" Because when we seek the Father to ask for His gifts and we say, "Knock, knock," He answers with "I know who's there: My beloved son, co-heir to the Kingdom of God by virtue of their baptism into Jesus Christ's death and resurrection." Jesus helps make this clear for us in verse 13 of our Gospel lesson this morning, "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?" Now, you might be saying, "That's pretty bold. How can we claim sonship alongside Jesus Christ?" Well, just listen to the Apostle Paul in Galatians 4:4b-5, "...God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." The Father doesn't see you, a poor, miserable sinner. He sees His Son, Jesus Christ, every time you come before Him in prayer. When you find yourself in need, the Father is there to pour out His Holy Spirit upon you, His beloved son, to bring you the gift that matters more than the things of this world, the forgiveness of sins which brings you everlasting life and salvation.

And so, dear fellow sons and co-heirs of the Kingdom of God, pray as the Lord has taught us. Not just in the words of The Lord's Prayer, though its importance cannot be understated, but in all your prayers. Rely on Christ, because He has already done the work for you to give you the right and the ability to beseech the Father for your needs. No act of persistence or earnestness on your part will affect the outcome of your prayer. Nevertheless, pray earnestly and pray persistently, but in Christ's name, and your prayer will always be answered. Come to your heavenly Father to ask, and forgiveness will be granted to you. Seek the answer to your prayer, and you will find it in Jesus. Knock, and as a son of God, it will be opened to you to receive the forgiveness He has promised by virtue of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ's all-atoning sacrifice. And because of that truth, you have received your promised inheritance of everlasting life in His heavenly glory. Amen.