

FOCUS: Jesus tells us to ask our Father boldly / shamelessly / audaciously for the things we need – if we pray as Jesus taught us, the Father will be delighted to answer.

FUNCTION: That hearers will receive a vision of the Father which encourages them to ask in prayer.

### 1. How does it feel to ask a favour?

Question –When's the last time you asked a favour of someone? Can you remember how it felt? Awkward, uncomfortable, embarrassed, like you were imposing? Did you feel like you would need to repay at some stage, even if the person says not to? Perhaps you're the kind of person who doesn't feel uncomfortable asking a favour – if so, you can enjoy this message knowing you have no work to do in this area at least : ).

I asked Glenn if he could think of the last time we asked someone for a big favour and neither of us could really think of one! Suggests two things – we are very privileged – rarely placed in a position of urgent need! And we are probably reluctant favour askers. And I'm guessing that's the majority of us. We're better at giving – not only is it a loving and Christian thing to do, it also has none of those troubling feelings of need, gratitude and obligation attached. Glenn and I also agreed that the closer the relationship, the easier it is to ask a favour – our parents would be the first people we would turn to. But even that's not true for everyone. We'd also be more likely to ask favours from friends who we know will be comfortable asking us back. If you pick our kids up tonight, we'll pick up yours tomorrow. Then it feels a bit more balanced and equal. The obligation is paid.

### 2. Jesus tells a parable about an awkward favour...

Jesus tells a parable about an awkward favour and we're going to have a closer look at it today. Let me read it to you –

<sup>5</sup> And He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, <sup>6</sup> because a friend of mine has come to me from a journey and I have nothing to serve him'; <sup>7</sup> and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' <sup>8</sup> I tell you, even if he will not get up and give him anything just because he is his friend, yet because of his shamelessness he will get up and give him as much as he needs. (NASB)

A story about an everyday situation, probably more everyday than it would be in our context, but still fairly relatable. A few bits of cultural inside knowledge help us get a bit further – Jewish and ME culture (even today) – ultimate shame, disgrace to have nothing to offer a guest. Hospitality, but even more, self-respect and family honour, demanded that shelter and food be offered to anyone who requests it. On top of this, friends were unlikely to text, call or even write that they were coming so unexpected guests were not unusual. Bread and most other food are made by each household and are day to day

supplies – it would be common to have nothing by the end of the day. The request begins to look less like rude guests and bad budgeting and more like a genuinely urgent social predicament that could and would happen to anybody in the village.

The story also has a form or shape which Jesus, and others in the N and OT often use. Rabbis had a word for it which means 'light to heavy'. The story draws a contrast – if yes to A (light) then how much more yes to B (heavy). When Jesus tells these light to heavy stories he usually puts them as a question which begins "Which of you or Who among you?" Here are some other examples –

- Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here at once and take your place at the table'? NRSVUE Lk 17:7
- Who among you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? NRSVUE LK 14:48
- "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? NIV Lk 11:11

Implied answer to all these questions – No-one!

This parable centres round the same question – lost in translation (convoluted) – 2 questions in one Who among you who needed bread for a visitor would not go to your neighbour in the middle of the night and ask for some? Answer (in that culture) – No-one!

Who among you, if a friend came to the door in the middle of night asking for bread for a visitor, would tell him no, because you're in bed? Answer – No-one!

Another translation which has muddied this story is the part where it sounds as though the man in bed first refuses as a friend but then changes his mind because he is sick of being bothered. This is not what the story says! The Greek word for 'though' can equally mean 'if' and is more likely to do so here – if it's not the relationship with his friend that gets him up (it probably would) it'll be the shameless appeal for help! We'll see why this matters in a moment...

### 3. The parable tells us not about HOW to pray but about WHO we are praying to...

What is Jesus actually saying in this parable? My answer is – not what Christians have often thought! If we approach the story just looking for a 'how to pray' kind of answer, we will find it. I was taught growing up that this story is about persistence. If God doesn't seem to be willing to answer, keep asking. But the funny thing is, if we look closely at this story, there is actually no persistence going on! Jesus' point is – no-one would refuse to help! But doesn't this man knock and knock at the door? Well actually, no. Jesus talks about knocking in the next passage and we have somehow inserted it into this one! In some cases the translator has even done so! I usually like NLT – but look what it does to verse 8 – "if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you whatever you need because of your shameless persistence". The only words actually in this sentence are "~~if you keep knocking long enough~~, he will get up and give you whatever you need because of your shameless persistence". The trouble with this is we may assume that if the friend has to work at getting the sleeper's attention, that might be true for God too!

And that's why this matters! This parable is not primarily about how to pray - it is about who we are praying to. Light to heavy questions are often asked to teach about God's character, and that's exactly what this one does here! Here's what Jesus is saying - If we expect a human friend to

answer us in our need, how much more can we expect that God will do the same? And the answer is – infinitely much more! God is good and he is eager and delighted to answer us!

#### 4. Because of this, we can be audacious...

Once we've understood this, we can hear what the story does tell us to do – ask! The way the friend asks is interesting – the describing word appears only in this spot in the whole Bible. Because of the assumptions about persistence, this word is often translated as 'persistent'. Other words – boldness, importunity or shamelessness. The translation which best reflects it is 'audacity'. NIV uses 'shameless audacity'. Audacity = "*having the bravery to do something that could offend others.*" *The word has both a positive (bravery, bold) connotation and a negative (rude, impudent, disrespectful) connotation.* (vocabulary-vocabulary.com). The friend is right to ask and is also at the same time, a nuisance : ).

And isn't this kind of what a favour comes down to? I need to ask for this but is it too much? Will the person I'm asking reject my request, or think I don't deserve it? Often it's the nature of the need that pushes us over the line to audacity – even though it's the middle of the night, I need this bread so I have to ask!

#### 5. And ask for the audacious things Jesus tells us to!

Now, the story isn't saying that we need to be audacious, that only audacious people get God's attention – that if we are quiet or polite, he won't respond. It's not the manner of the request that is audacious, it's the request itself. What Jesus is saying is – God is good! He delights to hear our requests and he will grant even the audacious ones, the ones we don't deserve! So don't be shy.

So what kind of audacious prayers is Jesus talking about? Lord, please can I win a million dollars? Lord, please make my straight hair curly or my curly hair straight?

Let's look at what has happened just before this story, possibly in the same conversation –

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples spoke to him. "Lord," he said, "teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

<sup>2</sup> Jesus said to them, "When you pray, this is what you should say.

" 'Father,  
may your name be honored.

May your kingdom come.

<sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread.

<sup>4</sup> Forgive us our sins,  
as we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

Keep us from falling into sin when we are tempted.' " (NIRV)

This is the HOW of prayer. If you've been a Christian for a while, maybe the familiarity of these words dulls their impact. But it's quite likely that to the disciples these sound like pretty audacious requests to make and if we think about it, so they are! Forgive our sins, protect us from ourselves and from evil, Provide all our daily needs. Who are we to request these things from God himself?

Now do you see how the parable works? Having explained how to pray, Jesus is saying – don't be afraid that God will reject these prayers – after all if even a grumpy friend in the middle of the night answers an audacious request, won't your loving Father be eager and ready to give you whatever you need?

## 6. So why don't we ask? Don't be shy.

I wonder how you respond to this story?

Perhaps you've known God for some time, and you've heard lots about his goodness and kindness and generosity. But do you ask audacious things? If not, why not? Can you pin it down? Are you worried that he won't answer? Do you struggle to believe that he really wants to answer you? Are you too polite with God? Do you not want to bother him? I hope this story gives you the confidence to go to your Father and ask him for what you need. Don't be shy.

Do you not yet feel you know God personally? Are you unsure about his goodness? Have you assumed he is distant or uninterested? I hope this story gives you the encouragement to approach him and find out his goodness and lovingkindness for yourself. Don't be shy.

## 7. Let's ask our good Father...

God's very nature inclines him to answer us, to graciously give us whatever we need.

In Isaiah 55, he says, -

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;  
and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

<sup>2</sup> Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare.

<sup>3</sup> Give ear and come to me, listen, that you may live. 55:1-3 NIV

It takes him further –

<sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

This verse shows how God's action in demonstrating his love for us in Jesus is pure grace. It is the ultimate favour!

<sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

This verse takes today's parable to a new level. Not only is his character gracious and trustworthy, but his actions have already proven it as well. If our loving Father would give us his Son, is there anything he wouldn't graciously give us?

So will we ask?