

Proper 12



Prayer of the Day

O God, your ears are open always to the prayers of your servants. Open our hearts and minds to you, that we may live in harmony with your will and receive the gifts of your Spirit; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Genesis 18:20-32

{20} Then the LORD said, "How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! {21} I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know." {22} So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the LORD. {23} Then Abraham came near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? {24} Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? {25} Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" {26} And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake." {27} Abraham answered, "Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. {28} Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." {29} Again he spoke to him, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." {30} Then he said, "Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." {31} He said, "Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." {32} Then he said, "Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it."

20. How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! See Genesis 13:13.

22. the men...went toward Sodom: The three men have been standing with Abraham looking down on Sodom. Now two of them (19:1) go down to Sodom.

while Abraham remained standing before the Lord: This is a *Tiqqune soferim*, an ancient modification of the original text: "while the Lord remained standing before Abraham." It was felt that it was disrespectful for Yahweh to remain standing before Abraham.

23-32. Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Abraham is not haggling with God over the fate of Sodom. He is concerned to demonstrate the justness of the destruction of Sodom. "God's righteousness must really be seen, that is, one must be able to recognize it in the different lot of the pious and the impious." [1]

I will forgive the whole place for their sake: Abraham was concerned that the righteous would perish with the guilty. Yahweh's mercy exceeds Abraham's expectation. In the end not even ten righteous are found, and Sodom is destroyed. However, provision is made for the righteous. Lot, his wife, and his two daughters are rushed out of the city (the prospective sons in law thought he was joking and remained (Genesis 19:14-17).

[33: Yahweh leaves and Abraham returned to his "place." The next day Abraham returned and saw the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:27).]

Psalm 138

{1} I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; {2} I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything. {3} On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul. {4} All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth. {5} They shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD. {6} For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away. {7} Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me. {8} The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

1. *the gods*: The word translated "gods" is the Hebrew *ha'elohim*, a plural noun usually translated in the singular as "God," referring to Yahweh, but sometimes translated as "angels" or "mighty ones." For example, in Psalm 8:5 it is translated "God" by New Revised Standard Version, and "angels" by the King James version. "...the solution most consonant with the context identifies the *'elohim* with the deities of the heathen kings mentioned in v. 4, 'All the kings of the earth.' Before these gods and their worshipers the Israelite king proclaims his faith in Yahweh." [2]

2. *I bow toward your holy temple*: In the dedication prayer for the Temple Solomon prayed, when "a foreigner comes and prays *toward* this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel." The singer may be in a foreign land where (s)he cannot go to the temple, so (s)he bows *toward* the temple.

4-5. *All the kings of the earth*: The whole world in the persona of the kings of the earth sing the praises of Yahweh. See also Psalm 68:32; 98:3.

6. *the haughty he perceives from far away*: The image is of looking at a high mountain from a great distance, and seeing a low hill. As we sing the Psalm we think of Abraham and the three men looking down on Sodom.

7. *Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me*: The trouble is not specific, but Yahweh's action on behalf of the psalmist is clear: "You stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me."

Colossians 2:6-15 [16-19]

{6} As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, {7} rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. {8} See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. {9} For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, {10} and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. {11} In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; {12} when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. {13} And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, {14} erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. {15} He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it. [16] Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. {17} These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. {18} Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking, {19} and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and

held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God.]

7. *established in the faith, just as you were taught*: "The Christian Gospel is essentially an *historical* account of what happened in the past; yet also essentially, it means incorporation *now* in the still living Person of whom it tells—in the contemporary Christ." [3]

8. *elemental spirits of the universe*: "...it seems reasonable to take it here to mean simply 'elementary teaching'—teaching by Judaistic or pagan ritualists, a 'materialistic' teaching bound up with 'this world' alone, and contrary to the freedom of the Spirit." [4]

9. *in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily*: Yahweh assumed actual physical presence in Christ, as opposed to either a "seeming" physical presence, or a "spiritual" presence.

12. *buried with him in baptism*: "Baptism in the N.T. is more often viewed as *death* than as *washing*." [5] We share with Christ both his death and his resurrection by God's action.

16-19: Matters of food or festivals, asceticism, visions, and the worship of spiritual beings other than God are shadows of the substance of Christ and the product of human thought. "...right behaving does not lead to our redemption; rather, right behavior flows from the redemption won for us by that man Jesus who is God. Our good works of love demonstrate our belief in this good news. They are necessary because they reveal that our faith is grounded in God and not in ourselves. Paul is unequivocal: God in Christ has already achieved what we are all trying to achieve by our own wits." [6]

Luke 11:1-13

{1} He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." {2} He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. {3} Give us each day our daily bread. {4} And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial." {5} And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; {6} for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' {7} And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' {8} I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. {9} "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. {10} For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. {11} Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? {12} Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? {13} 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!"

In Matthew the Lord's Prayer is in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:9-13), and is longer than Luke's form, with additions to the opening and close and additional petitions.

1. *He was praying in a certain place*: While there is no way to determine the "original" setting for the Lord's Prayer, a setting like this is not unlikely.

as John taught his disciples: See Luke 5:33. There is no indication what John taught his disciples, but the implication is that it was "some prayer-form used by John that is different from the ordinary." [7]

2. *Father*: "...suggests an intimate relationship between the disciples and God that is

akin to that of Jesus himself; God is not merely the transcendent lord of the heavens, but is near as a father to his children." [8] "...the nature of God...is not primarily paternal—that is he does not exist primarily for us. No doubt we are, and can only be, concerned with the way in which he exists for us." [9]

hallowed be your name: "With the command here in the passive voice, God is commanded to 'hallow' his person, his status as God, that is, to act and thus reveal himself to be the God he is, to make known his exclusive personage." [10]

3. *our daily bread*: "...the petition captures the peasant view of time: neither yesterday nor the distant future is of concern; it is only the needs of 'this day, today,' the immediate present, that command attention." [11]

4. *forgive us our sins*: Matthew has "debts," referring to material debts. Luke's use of sins refers to our "indebtedness" to God. Matthew adds an explanation of the petition for forgiveness. "...if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14). "The condition of forgiving then is to be forgiven; the condition of being forgiven is to forgive." [12]

5-8: By his persistence the man threatens to expose the lack of sensitivity of his friend. "By morning the entire village would know of his refusal to provide hospitality. He thus gives in to public exposure as a shameless person." [13]

9-10: Nothing ventured, nothing gained. If you do not ask God for the gift he has to give you cannot receive it.

11-12: A human father will not deceive his child and give him/her things that could hurt him/her.

13. *If you...know how to give good gifts...how much more*: God is a better father than the best human father; God will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask.

Reflection

God showed his great mercy in that if there were ten righteous persons in Sodom he would not destroy it. But God's mercy is even greater, for the sake of Jesus, God has forgiven us all our sins and given us eternal life.

God is a better friend than our best friends, a better father, than human fathers. Our friends may have to be "encouraged" to help us in our need. As evil as we are, we do not play dangerous practical jokes on our children. Yet our heavenly Father will give us more than we ask, and without our persistence. When we pray we can be sure that God will answer our prayer.

In the midst of our enemies God will protect us and provide for us and fulfill his purpose for us. We should not look to human wisdom or traditional ways of thinking and acting for our well-being. We must live our lives in Christ, "for in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." It may not make sense, but it is God's word.

Hymns [14]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

326 --E--My Heart Is
441 --E--Eternal Spirit of

207 --II--We Who Once
442 --G--O Thou, Who

438 --D--Lord, Teach Us
519 --P--My Soul, Now

376, 384, 307, 793s/772v

Prayers of the People [\[15\]](#)

P or A: The Lord calls us to seek, knock, and ask that we might find truth and life. And so we pray in Jesus' name and respond together, "Amen."

A: For the body and blood of Christ, which joins us to you and the whole church throughout time and space, that we may come to your table in humble gratitude and in true communion with one another. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

A: For the forgiveness of wicked deeds done in the name of Christ. We recall in sorrow and repentance the violence done to indigenous people in the name of Christian conquerors, praying that such atrocities shall not be repeated, and that their effects, which ripple throughout the generations, may come to an end. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

A: For our continued life in Christ crucified, that the ways of the world which seek to glorify humanity may not lead us astray. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

A: For those who suffer illness, that they might be comforted by friends and family, and restored to health by you. We pray for _____. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

A: For the people of this congregation, young and old, that we may continue to seek you in the face of the challenges of this world. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

P: That you would find us, open your door in a gesture of welcome, and respond to our prayers. All of this we ask in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Or [\[16\]](#)

Presider or deacon

Like Abraham before the gates of Sodom, let us beseech the Lord for the salvation of all.

Deacon or other leader

For this holy gathering, and for the people of God in every place.

For mercy, justice, and peace in all the world.

For farmers and a good harvest, for travelers and those on vacation, and for safety from violent storms.

For all those who hunger and thirst: the sick and the dying the poor and the oppressed, prisoners and captives, and for their families.

For those who rest in Christ and for all the dead.

For ourselves, our families, our companions, and all those we love.

Lifting our voices with all creation, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

Presider

Father of the Word, whose Son taught us to pray, give us what we ask this day and open the door when we knock; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version

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[1] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-26: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981, p. 291.

[2] Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms III 101-150: Introduction, Translation, and Notes with an appendix, The Grammar of the Psalter*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1970, p. 276.

[3] C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*. Cambridge University Press, 191962, p. 89.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 96.

[6] Thomas R. Gildemeister, "Christology and the Focus of Faith: Readings from Paul's Letter to the Colossians in Year C," *Quarterly Review*, Spring 1998, p. 103.

[7] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985, p. 902.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 898.

[9] Charles Williams, *He Came Down from Heaven*. p. 10.

[10] Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 350.

[11] *Loc. cit.*

[12] Williams, *Ibid.*, p. 159.

[13] Malina, *Ibid.*, p. 351.

[14] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclc0001.txt>

[15] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_c.txt

[16] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>