

Bible Study: How to Pray 4

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[0 : 00] Gentlemen, we're looking at the fourth session on Luke chapter 11 on the subject of prayer.

So it would be not inappropriate to begin with it, but let's just bow our heads. Our God and Father, as you have promised the presence by the Spirit of the Lord Jesus with us, and as we read in the Scriptures how the disciples turned to him and asked him to teach them to pray, we would ask you now to teach us to pray.

Not that it would be something which we would learn to do by ourselves, but something which we would seek to learn to let you do in us, that our hearts and our mouths may be given to the prayers, which are the articulation of the things that you, by your Holy Spirit, are saying to us, and the articulation of the deepest longings of our own hearts.

So, Lord, teach us to pray as we turn our minds and our hearts to your word. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Now, in Luke chapter 11, I'd like to congratulate you all for getting here and hope that you all get home safely as well.

We've looked first at when the disciples said, Lord, teach us to pray, and Jesus, in response to that request, gave them a pattern prayer, and the pattern prayer we've spent a lot of time on, which is the Lord's Prayer.

[2 : 28] And so that that is both a prayer and it is a pattern of prayer. So that if you wanted to divide your prayers up for the day, then that's the way you do it.

And I spoke to you about that last week, how the hallowing of God's name, the coming of his kingdom, the provision of bread, the forgiveness one of another, and the overcoming the power of evil are the things that form the basis of all our prayer.

But then I talked to you last week about the two houses and the powerlessness that we feel when we pray, that we're in a state of powerlessness and our weakness, and God teaches us to have confidence in him by asking and seeking and knocking.

In the passage that we're looking at today, which is Luke chapter 11, verse 14 following, we're looking at the power struggle.

Now, the power struggle is between us, you know, between God and Satan, really. And you'll see how it's brought out in a very simple and familiar story.

[3 : 57] But we're talking today basically, but I'm talking today basically about the power struggle. Let's read the passage, and it goes from chapter 11, verse 14, on page 69 in your Pew Bible.

It goes to verse 23. Now he was casting out a demon that was dumb. When the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke, and the people marveled.

But some of them said, he casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, while others to test him, sought from him a sign from heaven.

But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls.

And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul.

[5 : 05] And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when one stronger than he assails him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor, in which he trusted, and divides his spoil.

He who is not with me is against me. He who does not gather with me scatters. So you see Jesus surrounded by a group of people.

And among those people, there is a man who, we're told, the diagnosis is that he was dumb. And he was dumb, not because of any physical impairment of his speech organ, but he was dumb by reason of some kind of demonic possession.

[6 : 20] Something was wrong, and he was unable to speak. Now, there's lots of things that, I mean, working with children or adults who are unable to speak.

Speaking ultimately, I think, is a terribly important thing for us to do.

And to learn to speak the truth from the heart consistently is something that I think probably we all find extremely difficult.

either the context is not congenial in which we want to say it, we are deceiving ourselves, or we have reasons why we don't think it appropriate to speak the truth from the heart, so that in one sense we are dumb.

We have people that we would like to talk to, but we don't know how we would put into words what we want to say. We have people that we would like to speak to, but we're afraid that our guilt or our hate or our, some other sort of condition of our own minds will be, will find expression in the words which we use, and so we can't speak.

[7 : 45] And, you know, and I, I know lots of people in this parish who, year after year, I say good morning to them, and they say good morning to me, but we never say anything of any significance to one another.

And we have all sorts of tricks that we use in language, you know, that we always have a joke ready to laugh at or some silly remark which has no meaning at all.

And the superficiality and casualness of our speech means that our relationships to people remain fairly static because we can't speak to them.

We are dumb and, and can't say anything. And, if we are suddenly confronted with them and have to say something, what do we say? People often go and visit someone who, who has suffered a bereavement and have no idea what to say.

People go and see somebody who's seriously ill in hospital or who has just had very bad news about their own health and you wonder what to say.

[8 : 55] People who are caught up in grief and you don't know what to say. So, I just give you all these illustrations to tell you that, um, this fellow who could not speak because he was restrained by a demon is not very far from the experience of any one of us.

that, uh, we cannot say, we cannot speak the truth in love in so many situations. We are dumb and we need to be given grace in order to talk.

Now, sometimes, I, I can't resist the temptation to say this. Some people just don't say anything and other people say a whole lot of stuff but it doesn't mean anything.

And, uh, but I think it's, I think they're both sort of symptoms of the same condition. You know, that, uh, uh, and so, what, what you have here is Jesus dealing with one person so that he speaks.

He overcomes whatever it is, whatever demonic spirit is possessing him and he is able to speak. speak. I mean, it's not unusual for a married couple to say, for the first time in ten years we were able to speak to one another.

[10 : 18] Now, that doesn't mean they haven't been nattering at each other for ten years. It just means that in, in a significant way they were given a time and a place where they were able really to talk to one another.

and that happens in a lot of our relationships that the, the, uh, what Christ did for this man can be done for us and so we can identify closely with him.

The demon had gone out of the man and the man spoke. So, you have that, uh, you have that lovely picture of how, of how Jesus is able to, uh, to do that for someone.

And, and I, I think when, when people have, uh, an encounter with Jesus, very often one of the indications of that encounter is they're suddenly able to talk about it.

To talk about something they have never been able to talk about before. They are suddenly able to open their mouths in prayer in a way that they never have been before.

[11 : 37] They're, uh, the, I mean, one of the New Testament gifts, which is most controversial, is that, uh, that with, uh, faith in Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit, people suddenly start to babble in what, uh, in what, the New Testament calls tongues and, uh, and sometimes is referred to as a

language of worship.

They suddenly have great freedom to speak. And, uh, and that, and that has been a very therapeutic thing for a whole lot of people, that they, they suddenly find that where they were unable to speak before, they now are able to speak.

And, uh, and, uh, the Corinthian church got into great trouble with it and they, and, uh, it became an end in itself, but, it still had to do with, somehow, this profound encounter between Jesus and an individual so that the individual was finally able to speak about things which mattered a great deal to him.

And, uh, and, uh, and I think that's a wonderful gift and a wonderful miracle and a very practical, in a sense, a kind of household miracle because it, it's, uh, it's, uh, it's so meaningful when you think about, uh, about it.

And, and it's just, it's just portrayed here, the whole thing, the whole story is in one verse. And then you begin to get the response to the story.

[13:18] And the response to the story was that, uh, was that some people marveled. You see that there were three classes of people, uh, those who marveled at what Jesus had done.

And to them it was, uh, it was a miracle and they marveled at it and they thought that's, that's wonderful. Uh, uh, there may be some thought that they didn't, they didn't really understand what was happening, they just were surprised that it happened, you know.

Uh, they, they felt it was an interesting thing to see. Uh, some, you see the next category of people, that's the first kind, uh, and then the next category were the Beelzebub people who said, this, uh, this happens because of Beelzebub.

This is the power of evil at work. This is not, uh, this is a deception of Satan and, uh, the reason that this man is able to do it is because he is in league with Satan.

And, uh, that, you know, that was a wonderful put down. Uh, I mean, it was so total and so complete and so, uh, I mean, it was so damaged that that's how it had happened, that this, this had been done by the power of evil.

[14:43] And you'll find that a whole lot of things that, uh, happen in the life of, uh, of believers in Christ is put down as being evil.

Manifestations of spiritual life which are entirely legitimate and and saving and redeeming and healing and renewing.

Uh, one of the standard ways we have of dealing with them is to say it's evil. And, uh, and that's basically what they did here.

They said, this is, this is Beelzebub and, uh, and that's how it happened, you know. I, uh, I mean, this, in the Globe and Mail this morning, there's an article on Jews for Jesus.

I don't know if any of you read it. And, uh, some rabbi has stated categorically that this is a form of latent anti-Semitism that, uh, anybody would want Jews to come to faith in Jesus.

[15:52] and so it's condemned. Another rabbi by the name of James Pecker, familiar to most of you, said, indeed, it isn't.

And, uh, so that the, uh, the article has to do with these two rabbis, Jim Pecker and, and, uh, somebody named Fearnbaum, I think. But they're, they're, they're talking about, about this, you know.

And the, the difficulty I mean, what happens is that, uh, you know, not many of us perhaps would be as bold as Jews for Jesus are.

And I, uh, they're, they're a remarkably bold crew that do that kind of work. Uh, and, uh, and they're, they recognize that the people whom they are trying to win to faith in Christ are, uh, not easily won. and, and, uh, that they're going to suffer a lot of rejection and so on. But, but, uh, they, uh, they persist in it.

[17:02] And, uh, it's a very interesting story to, to, to read about what happens. Because, you see, Christian faith, faith in Jesus Christ is profoundly Jewish.

you know, all the scriptures are, are Jewish. You know, the, the, most of the testimony to who, to whom Jesus is comes from the Jewish scriptures.

Most of the New Testament preaching is based on the Jewish scriptures. Jesus is a Jew, Paul is a Jew, Barnabas is a Jew, all, most of the apostles were Jews.

the early church was Jewish. And the whole, the whole of, of the, uh, of the, of the Christian church is in some ways come out of the tension around who Jesus is between the Gentiles and the Jews

who both came to put their faith in him.

And, uh, so that, uh, it's not as simple as just saying uh, this is anti-Semitism because, uh, it, it's, it goes far deeper than that.

[18 : 22] But it's, but that kind of thing, I think is, uh, is the kind of response that you get in this story when they say, this is done by Beelzebub, the prince of demons.

You know, this, the source of this whole thing is evil. evil. And you know that that stance in our society is, is a stance that a lot of people take, you know, that religion basically corrupts humanity. And therefore, I am a better human by not being religious. And, uh, not getting caught up in it because that is all inferior human activity.

And I am brave enough to face the world as it really is without getting messed up with any kind of spiritual dimension. And, uh, that, that, uh, the spiritual dimension of life is a sick part of life with which I have nothing to do.

So that when, when they said to Jesus, even though they saw this miracle, they said, that's Beelzebub, the prince of demons. So, that was the second group that replied.

[19 : 37] The third group that replied, uh, said, we want a sign. Now, the fact is they've just been given one. The healing of the dumb man.

They've just been given one. But, what does it say about them? Uh, it says in, in the story, it says, uh, um, others to test him, sought from him, a sign from heaven.

They considered the healing, uh, the, the, uh, gift of speech to a dumb man was not, uh, a high-class sign, the kind that they really wanted.

They wanted something more than that. And so, they overlooked the sign they'd been given and asked for something more. So, that there was a certain blindness to what was there in front of them. And, uh, they asked for something more. So, that's, uh, those are the three people that responded. Now, what happens then in the story is that, uh, and, I mean, this is something that you've seen.

[20 : 49] Jesus knowing their thoughts. Now, Jesus understood them.

We, you know, we live in the day of, of, of counselors. And, and counselors are people who know how you're thinking.

and they can listen to you speak and tell you why you're saying it that way and what it means and what lies behind it. And, uh, if that's a gift that we have acquired through training and psychology, that no doubt will be of great benefit.

But, I think that Jesus was supremely good at it. He knew what they were thinking. And so, he wanted to confront them with what they're thinking at the most sort of basic level in their lives.

Now, uh, do you see the significance of this for prayer? It means that Jesus wants to encounter us, you know, we who are, you know, the kind of people who marvel superficially, perhaps, or who dismiss superficially, perhaps, or who are blind to what, in fact, is right in front of them.

[22 : 18] Uh, that we are people like that and that Jesus wants to break through that and to get to the level of, well, what are you thinking and what is the significance of it?

What are you afraid of? What are you hiding from? What are you covering up? uh, he says, uh, I want, uh, Jesus says, he want, he, he, knowing their thoughts, he went to work on them and, uh, gave them a few very simple lessons.

And, uh, he said, you know, that a kingdom divided, and we should know lots about this today because we're discovering that, that, uh, that a kingdom can't stand if it's divided and Jesus just makes that as a simple political observation.

And you know what's, what's happening in Azerbaijan and what's happening in Hungary and what's happening in Romania. And, uh, everybody is, uh, you know, looking at, at South Africa and recognizing that there are many kingdoms in South Africa, tribal kingdoms, which are going to come into conflict with one another.

And is there any way that we can overcome this conflict in these countries? When, when, when Mr. Gorbachev, uh, this does what he did in the last three days, according to the news report, the danger is, uh, will it just mean that the factions in that country will destroy each other?

[23 : 56] Or will they find in democracy a higher unifying principle to which they are prepared to subscribe?

Is there a unifying reality there which will allow the communists to vote communists and the social democrats to vote social democrat and the conservatives to vote conservative, the liberals to vote and so on?

Will that happen? Is, will there be a unifying thing or will the inevitable course of history take place that a kingdom divided will fall because there is no grounds for groups to come together?

And you see that over and over again on the front page of the paper. So, Jesus is simply making that. Then he says, now, look at what has taken place here and you're standing in judgment on me and you're condemning me by saying, you are in league with Satan.

And he says, well, suppose, hypothetically, that you are right, that I am in league with Satan. You are passing judgment on me.

[25 : 12] Now he says, who are your judges? In other words, whose judgment do you submit to? You've chosen to pass judgment on me and dismiss me, Jesus tells them, as he might tell us.

You've chosen to dismiss me. Well, whose judgment do you subject yourself to? If you want me to subject myself to your judgment, whose judgment are you going to be under?

It's a wonderful response, isn't it? Because, because lots of people are prepared to condemn Jesus Christ. you know, to say, I judge that you are, in fact, counterproductive in terms of the society we're seeking to build, the emancipation we're seeking to enjoy, the freedom which belongs to us, the fulfillment which belongs to our human destiny.

You are counterproductive to all of this. And therefore, we condemn you outright. and he says, all right, you're passing judgment on me.

Whose judgment are you subject to? And he asks them that question. Then he says to them, you know, this isn't a question of a divided kingdom.

[26 : 39] He said, by whom do your sons cast out demons? Well, I find that a fascinating question, you know, what do you do with people who have a dumb spirit and can't speak?

What do you do with people who are caught in that situation? He said that to them. If you'll tell me what you do, then I'll compare what you do with what I've done, and then we'll know who's right. now I suspect, though I'm not certain of this because commentators argue about it all the time, but I think that their sons in fact didn't cast out demons, you know, that they didn't have the ability to do what Jesus had done.

Now, the reason I suspect that is because the text goes on and says this. He said, by whom do your sons cast them out?

They will be your judges, you know. So you are saying, you know, your sons, do they cast out demons?

[28 : 01] Well, if they don't cast out demons, then what are you going to do? You're going to have to submit to their judgment on you. And then he uses this analogy with them.

He says, but if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Now, Jesus was referring to a story I suspect they knew well. And it's one of the stories from the book of Exodus where Aaron and Moses were before Pharaoh.

And Pharaoh threw his rod on the ground and all the dust of Egypt turned to sort of gnats and lice. You know, that was one of the curses that came on on Egypt. And Pharaoh said to his magicians that surrounded him, okay, you show them that you can do the same thing.

[29 : 10] And they couldn't. And they said to Pharaoh, this is the finger of God. God. And, you know, that this is categorically different than anything we can do.

And he says, okay, I am prepared to come under that judgment. And you must know that if what has happened here in the healing of this dumb man so that he can speak, if what has happened has happened by the finger of God, then what that means is that the kingdom of God has come upon you.

There is another kingdom. There is another reality that's broken in on your world. And remember, Jesus started by saying, knowing what their thoughts were.

And Jesus made a particular assault on their minds to get to argue with them in this way so that they would come to understand what he in fact was telling them, that the kingdom of God had come in him, that the kingdom of God was present among them in his person.

And he was trying to convince them of that. And of course, that's the heart of the gospel. That's what John Chapman spent a week here doing for us, to say that there is another dimension, and that dimension centers on the person of Jesus Christ.

[31 : 00] And if you look at him and who he is and what he has done and what he does, then you will know that the kingdom of God is another reality in your world that you are choosing to ignore.

And it's not that it isn't there, it's that you either respond superficially to it without recognizing the implications of it, you dismiss it as being the work of Beelzebub, or else you have pretensions to being wonderfully literate in the scriptures and are looking for a great sign and ignoring the one that's right in front of you.

And so that's what you've done. And so you have ignored the kingdom. Well, that's, my time is almost up, but one last thing which I, which I think is one of the sort of key stories, of, this is, you won't recognize this just at first, but it's not a golf course.

Ah. There you are. Now this is the picture, I take it, of, ah, the next few verses, when it says, a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace.

palace. This is a rough picture of the palace. And, ah, there, it's fully armed, the doors are locked, there are bars on the window, there is no way that you can break into that.

[33 : 10] That man is fully armed, he's considered every eventuality, there's a moat that runs around the outside of it, it is totally unapproachable, there is no way you can shake this man out of here.

He is the strong man, and you cannot do anything to break away from him. So there he is, complete, Jesus says, he is a strong man, fully armed, ah, and, ah, and he keeps, he guards his palace, and his goods are in peace.

Now, that is Jesus' picture of our world, which does not at any point question the authority of the prince of darkness.

He is in control, and nobody can challenge him. You can't challenge him, I can't challenge him, nobody can challenge him.

He is in control. And what happens to us in the course of our earthly lives is that though we may aspire to break out, we cannot challenge the ultimate power of evil, and we are kept by it.

[34 : 32] We can't break away from it. We can't break loose from it. It is in control. We are subject to the process of law and sin and death.

and we submit to it. And in submitting to it, we are in a sense given the freedom of the house. We can do anything we want within and under the control of the strong man.

So that's the picture of our world. But to this palace comes the stronger man.

And the stronger man is Jesus Christ. and he enters right into the palace, right through the front door, unarmed. And he becomes subject to the strong man.

He has leg irons put on him. His arms are in irons. He's taken down into the deepest dungeon in the most solitary of solitary confinement where there is no glimmer of light.

[35 : 42] he is put down there in that place. And that place is called death. And death is the ultimate power of evil.

And Jesus becomes the prisoner of the strong man. And the strong man puts him in his strongest safe hold that he cannot break up.

man. And so Jesus says, this is the story. This is what happens. When one stronger than he assails and overcomes him, he takes away his armor which he trusted and divides his spoil.

And so Jesus, having been put in the ultimate deepest dungeon, breaks loose, overcomes death, and walks out of this, leaving the doors wide open so that people can walk out with him.

He breaks the power of the strong man. Now, I mean, it's a very powerful picture that Christ has broken out from under the dominion of the strong man.

[37 : 12] And most of us consider, I mean, our natural sort of human capacity is to consider that submission to the strong man is the course of wisdom.

You know, give in graciously and recognize that all there is in life is what you can enjoy under the power of the strong man.

But you go back to the prayer, deliver us from evil. Well, this is the picture of evil, a palace which is kept and out of which there is no escape.

The strong man is in control. And we pray, deliver us from evil. And Jesus does exactly that by becoming subject to it, being put in the deepest dungeon, and from that dungeon walking out and leaving all the doors open.

Now, this is, this wasn't really a very wise thing for Jesus to have done because it says he takes away the armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil.

[38 : 22] Well, you see, he messes up this whole thing. And this is our world. This is the world we know and understand. This is the world that we have accommodated ourselves to.

This is the world that gives us our rewards and makes life, as far as it's possible, worthwhile for us. And Jesus smashes all that and says those things don't count.

There is something far greater than that. Break out. And the human heart tends to say, no, no, no, let's just live within the strong man's house and he keeps his goods in peace and he has a way of allowing us to go on our way without worrying too much.

We don't want any palace revolt here. We're prepared to live here and to live subject to the conditions of our life. And we may have a few moments of bliss.

we may acquire something that's worthwhile in the course of our life subject to this power of evil. But we don't want to do anything else. But Jesus smashes the whole thing wide open and says you're free.

[39 : 34] You can go. You're no longer subject to sin. You're forgiven. You're no longer subject to death. You have eternal life. And our human heart shrinks from it and says I don't want all that.

All that Christ wins for us by being the stronger man. And so he remains a threat for us. Well, that's, you know, I think a lot of us really, I mean, I think humanly speaking, we don't want to get in on the power struggle that's involved.

We don't want to share the freedom that Christ has won for us. Do you remember when Jesus in John chapter 8 talked to them? He said to them, if you continue in my word, you will be my disciples, you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

That was the promise that Jesus gives in John 8 31. And the sons of Abraham came up to him and said, we've never been anything but free. You know, they, and of course what they were seeing was that they had lived happily thus far in here.

But the freedom that Christ wanted to give them was far more radical than anything they even dared to dream of or to hope for or to believe in. and that's why I think we're reluctant to see all that God has done for us in Christ and the freedom that he's won.

[41 : 30] And so we get trapped in in the great power structure of evil which we come to realize it's not so bad.

You get used to it. You know, it's, I've told you this before but when I used to live in Kingston, Ontario and every day the big black Cadillac would meet the Toronto train and take the prisoners off the Toronto train in and it was I mean it was well I mean recidivism was in those days they said was 80% you know that they they all came back because a lot of them couldn't handle life outside the penitentiary any longer.

They learned that that was the only discipline in their life that was the only order in their life that was the only place they got eight hours sleep a night and three square meals a day. They couldn't handle the freedom of being outside the penitentiary and I think that we're in the same way in a sort of way afraid of the freedom that Christ has won for us and don't know what to do with it that it's too threatening to us but there it is and when Jesus teaches us to pray he gives us the pattern he shows us our personal powerlessness and he shows us that the ultimate objective in our prayers is that his kingdom should come and that we should be set free from the power of sin and death and darkness and that's a radical kind of freedom to which he asks us

I mean remember he said that he knew what was in their minds and what was in their minds was that they wanted to live comfortably under the power of the prince of darkness rather than the terrible discomfort of being set free and so that I think that's such a powerful powerful story of what the gospel is all about what it is that Jesus Christ is saying to us and how hard it is for us to hear him let me pray father thank you for the terrible incisiveness of your word and the explosive power of it in our world and in our hearts but give us grace to accept the freedom which you have won for us and to live in it perform in each of us the miracle of taking our dumbness our dumbness in prayer our dumbness in communicating love to one another all the things that inhibit our speech that we may speak the truth in love to one another and know your grace in the midst of it we ask in Jesus name amen

I before him ha an one