

OUTER OPTIMISM WITH INNER DESPAIR

Dr. Fred Fourie ~ Sunday, September 2, 2007



Luke 11:1-13 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." He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial." 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; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' 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.' 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." 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. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 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 our times, many people take life far too seriously! An old Chinese beatitude goes like this, "Blessed are they who can laugh at themselves. They shall never cease to be entertained!" The personnel manager of a large corporation was continually plagued over employee problems. One night while poring over the newspaper he read an article about how stress and tension drive some people to drugs. "I can understand that," he said to his wife. "I'd probably be on drugs myself if I weren't taking tranquilizers."

We are a downright uptight people. A Louis Harris poll concluded that 86% of Americans live with chronic stress, while 60% do nothing about stress, but carry it around. We have become a nation of worriers! The mood of many in our time is one of outer optimism and inner despair. Outer optimism and inner despair! Despite the outward confidence that many people show to the world, they have the feeling that somehow they have missed something in

life. They are not sure what it is. There is an empty spot in their lives. An early Christian church leader, Augustine [354-430], described life's emptiness as a "God-shaped void." Augustine wrote, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God."

In today's scripture, Jesus speaks of God's desire to give good things to his children. "Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake in stead of a fish?" he asked, "Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 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?"

Christian Author Leonard Sweet says, "Jesus should not be a word, but a way of life!" Jesus tells of a God who wants people to be happy.

Happiness that differs from the hollow and temporary pleasures of this world,
Happiness of the kind that cannot be found by searching for it,
Happiness that comes from within!

Happiness comes from the awareness that we have Mighty arms beneath us. Happiness comes from the deep down assurance that we belong to a great God who is with us and will be even when we move through the valley of the shadow of death. There is no greater source of true and lasting happiness in this world.

In the Psalms, King David of old stated, "Happy are those, whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord." The psalmist could never forget the time in his life when he sinned so deeply that God felt forever out of reach! King David went through the darkest valley of sin, until he discovered that he could no longer run away from God. Then something happened between David and David's God. He reconciled with God and the Bible says that his inner pain turned into lasting joy!

Wrongdoing robs us of true happiness. There is no one who is happier than the person whose conscience is clear. Happiness comes into the lives of those whose heavy burden of guilt is exchanged for forgiveness. This might sound old fashioned and even out of place. Talking about confession and forgiveness is not popular in our times. However, what do you and I do, when we know deep inside that we did wrong, that we caused pain, and that we did harm to others? Somehow, we can never forget the wrong that we have done. Unresolved guilt is a destroyer of life, love and happiness. It lingers on in our soul like an indelible stain on a white carpet.

Have you ever said those difficult words: "I was wrong - forgive me?" Somehow after doing just that, we discover how tender, and loving and forgiving people can be. Is it time to do something about your empty heart, your guilt stained life, your anxious mind? Is it time to ask for forgiveness? Then do so today and the promise of Jesus will come true. Our God is sure to restore your happiness!

We have a God who is willing and who is waiting. Jesus said that God is willing and waiting to give good things to his children, if only they would ask! He put it this way: "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." "It was grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved; how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed."

In Melanesia, the islanders still pray an ancient prayer:

"O Jesus, be the **canoe** that holds me up in the sea of life;
Be the **rudder** that keeps me in the straight road;
Be the **outrigger** that supports me in times of temptation,
Let your **Spirit** be my sail that carries me through each day.
Keep my body strong, so I can **paddle steadfastly** on in the voyage of life."

AMEN



*The Friend
at Midnight*
Luke 11:5-13