

Does it Pay to Pray?

† “Leave me alone!” (vv.7-10)

† “Turn...and...remember.” (vv.11-14)

In the name of Jesus, our forgiving Savior and Friend, dearly redeemed believers:

Isn't it ironic that the Jewish religious leaders were so upset with Jesus? In today's Gospel *the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."* (Luke 15:2 NIV) Didn't they remember what the LORD God did for their ancestors through Moses at Mount Sinai? But before we get too critical of their forgetfulness, we should ask why we pray so seldom. Have we forgotten how good God has been to us? And as if forgetting to pray isn't bad enough, we sometimes even ask a fatalistic question which we think sounds intelligent. Since God is in charge, and since God knows everything before we ask, then really, **Does it Pay to Pray?**

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God must be very patient. Our doubts and fears about His goodness should surely earn us a hot spot in eternal hell. Instead, our God takes us to Mount Sinai where Moses' steady, faithful prayer, keeps God's people from going up in smoke. God's wrath burns so hot. Can you feel the reason why?

Some of us can remember caring and sacrificing for someone, only to hear them shouting, “Leave me alone!” But what happened to God at Mount Sinai was worse than coming home and finding your spouse committing adultery. In just forty days of Moses on the mountain with God, the whole Israelite community committed spiritual adultery by worshiping the golden calf idol. Go figure! Before Moses could come down with the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God, God's people were breaking every single commandment! They weren't just begging, they were demanding that God would “leave us the hell alone!” And you know what? God was ready to oblige.

It's bad enough when a sinner says that to God, because every sinner deserves hellfire and damnation for loving things and people more than we love God. We're distracted from worship and God's Word right here in church, daydreaming about sports and hobbies, work and play, girlfriends, boyfriends, kids and neighbors. We think if we just had that house or car or job or position, then we could really be happy. Meanwhile, we forget to thank God for every good He's already given us. In our heart of hearts we are setting up our own calf idols built from the gold of God's generous blessings.

Can you imagine the terror of God saying this to Moses? *“Leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.”* It's the heat of hell when God says, “Leave me alone!” We're not surprised when flood victims pull out muddy carpet and toss stinking clothes and couches on the curb before they rot and mold. And it should be no surprise that God would want to be left alone to clean out His creation of all the foul-mouthed sinners demanding more and more while they worship Him less and less. How would you feel if people kept calling you by the wrong names? God's anger makes perfectly good sense.

But the first surprise is Moses. Wouldn't you expect him to agree? “God, I'm sick of these Israelites too. Nothing but trouble since we left Egypt. Quarreling about water, meat and manna. Do it! Destroy them and make me into a great nation. My gene pool has to be better than these whining losers!”

So really, **Does it Pay to Pray?** You and I have those times when we finally wake up and realize what a mess we've made of our lives. We have not listened to our parents and pastors. We have ignored the advice, counsel and commands of our good and gracious God. We know in those lucid moments

when the smoke finally clears that we're dirty enough from the floodwaters of our sins to have God say to us, "**Leave me alone!**" No surprise if He's done with us.

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But wait a minute! You've got to be kidding! Moses disagrees with God? Aren't we supposed to always say, "Yes, Lord," especially when it's to our personal advantage? Isn't that what it means to pray, "Thy will be done," so long as I always come out on top? Is pride why we ask, **Does it Pay to Pray?**

Moses knew God's will. The LORD had made it clear for centuries since the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – that He intended to make them into a great nation of shining lights to bring eternal life and salvation to all the nations of the world. According to Israel (Jacob) on his deathbed, the promise of the Ruler-Messiah would come through the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10), but Moses was from the tribe of Levi. There would be no Savior for anyone if the infuriated LORD God almighty, *El Shaddai*, carried out His death threat against the party-hardy Israelites down there dancing around the golden calf. But surprise! Instead of agreeing with God's threat to make a Moses-nation, the LORD's humble servant reminded Him of earlier Gospel-promises and prayed to God: "**Turn...and...remember.**"

And yet some still ask, **Does it Pay to Pray?** Tell that to the little boys pestering their dad, "You promised to take us fishing!" They don't care how foggy it is out there. Dad promised, and that's all that counts. Try to explain to the little girl climbing up on Mommy's lap that she's too tired to hold her right now. They may both be asleep in a few minutes, but that little childlike heart won't take "No" for an answer. Neither should ours when God has expressed His will to help us in every need.

We have in Moses' prayer one of the greatest secrets for tugging at the heart of our heavenly Father. Can you translate this into your own personal petition? Moses literally got sick of heart right in front of God. He broke down and begged God to His face just as you and I do whenever we kneel at the foot of the cross and seek our Savior's forgiveness for our selfish, materialistic, greedy attitudes.

And to what shall we appeal before our Father in heaven? Listen and translate: *Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God.* God put His Name on you in Baptism; now you can claim this undeserved favor of God too: "**O LORD,**" [Moses] said, "**why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?**" God had said Moses brought them up out of Egypt (32:7), but Moses refused to take the credit. Then this: "**Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people.**"

Translation: "LORD, my friends know I am a Christian. I've told them how I keep asking you for help. What will it say to them if I lack your strength, courage and patience in my time of need? How will you look to my relatives and neighbors if you fail to help me in this crisis? LORD, you never fail. You cannot fail. Help me for your mercy's sake to trust you boldly until your time of relief arrives, until you provide an escape. LORD, glorify your Name as you triumphed over sin, death and hell!"

Because Jesus died and rose again, we are totally and completely, forever forgiven. Now God wants us to keep reminding Him of His promises not because He will ever forget, but because by reminding Him, we keep reminding ourselves. Memorize: "**For I know the plans I have for you,**" declares the LORD, "**plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.**" (Jeremiah 29:11f NIV) The LORD did "**Turn...and...remember.**" He "**relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.**" Trusting all His exceeding great and precious promises as dear children of the heavenly Father, we need never ask, **Does it Pay to Pray?** God has commanded us to pray. God still promises to hear. And God has always shown His eagerness to give us far more than we can possibly ask or imagine. "LORD, leave me not alone. Hear my prayers for Jesus' sake." Amen.