

## **There is Another King: Jesus**

*Luke – Acts*

### **How the Father Gives**

*Luke 11:1 – 13*

BCACF Jan 2015

#### **Introduction: Being Part of a Great Family**

We've been talking about being part of God's family. The angle I want to talk about now is how the Father gives. God gives us the spiritual power and love to reflect the character of His family. Being part of a great family is empowering by itself. The summer after my freshman year, I went home for the summer. My friend Erica and I wanted to record a song that we had written. Because her family was a very musical family, she had some basic recording equipment at her house. During one of the times that we were there, her parents ordered pizza and I sat down with the whole family. It was Erica's mom and dad and two sisters. Now they are a Chinese American family. One of the things I noticed was that her mom and dad held hands. I had never seen Asian parents who held hands! I had to stop myself from staring. Then the conversation was really fun. They made jokes about each other. They shared about their day, and their lives. They invited me to share about myself. They asked me more questions. It was the best family conversation I had ever seen. It fed my soul. And the whole time, out of the corner of my eye, I was just amazed that the mom and dad held hands. After dinner, when everyone did their own thing, the mom and dad went over to the couch, and talked, and they still held hands! My own parents' marriage had never looked like that, and they were arguing about getting a divorce. So I was inspired. I wanted to ask, 'Can you adopt me?' Don't we all want to be part of a family like that? Where love is directed at you, yes – of course we want to be loved. But also, where love is not directed just at you. You're not at the center. Instead the love overflows from a relationship that exists before you, which is larger than you, and sets the tone for you. So when you encounter that love, it's like a river flowing from a huge spring. It has a shape and direction that calls you to drink from it and go with its flow.

#### **Relevance**

God is a family in Himself. The Father is turned towards the Son, and the Son is turned towards the Father. The Holy Spirit was first called by Augustine the bond of love between them. God is inherently other-centered. There is nothing self-centered in God. Even when God calls us to make Him first in our lives, it's not because He's the cosmic narcissist. It's because He is the source of other-centered love, so what He's really saying is that His love ought to be the center of everyone's life so He can flow through us, and we won't be narcissistic. So the Spirit of God is the bond of other-centered love. The Spirit conceived Jesus and turned the self-centered humanity in Jesus into other-centered humanity: towards the Father in devotion and towards others in appropriate love from there. So when we believe in Jesus, we receive his Spirit, and his Spirit begins changing us from the inside out by joining us to Jesus and each other, and through Jesus, to the Father. I like that, because we really become part of a great family, the family we call Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We'll look at Luke 11:1 – 13 to see three times how the Spirit is symbolized as food. The Spirit is named explicitly only in v.13, but Jesus is clearly building up to v.13. In each of the three sections, Jesus uses the motif of food to speak of the Spirit.

#### **Our Prayers: v.1 – 4**

The first section is centered on v.3, where Jesus says, 'Give us each day our daily bread.' The disciples had asked Jesus how he prays and how they ought to pray. Why? Because if you were one of Jesus' original disciples, you've seen him teach with authority. He's rebuked illnesses, demons, nature and death itself. Everything retreats at the advance of Jesus. Not only that, he courageously confronts all these things, he extends his welcome to outcasts, and lives stuck in sin and self-centeredness are transformed because of the sense of holiness that this man exudes. So because you want that power and love yourself, you ask him, 'Lord, teach us to pray.'

I hope that we do desire the same thing today. If you know people through whom God has done mighty things, or if you read the stories of Mother Teresa, Hudson Taylor, Elizabeth Eliot, and many others, you'll likely be impressed with the sense of God's power in their lives and the amazing love these people show. How can these men and

women live the lives they do? Where does the sense of power come from? Perhaps it too comes from their prayers. So we too ask, 'Lord, teach us to pray.' So Jesus gives a sample prayer.

'He said to them, 'When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, 4 For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us and lead us not into temptation.'

The disciples must have felt surprised at this. How could this prayer be so short? The rabbinic prayers of the time were much longer and more elaborate and flowery. By any standard you use, this is a short prayer. And that is the impression Jesus intends. He wants us to be impressed by the shortness, the simplicity, of prayer.

How can our prayers be so simple? So much power can be unleashed by a few phrases? Now let me make a qualification. We're talking here about a certain kind of prayer, prayers that are related to being empowered by the Spirit. I think that because in v.13, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit. There are other kinds of prayers that are related to deep healing, or changing circumstances, or listening for answers. Those kinds of prayers are not necessarily the kinds of subjects Jesus is dealing with. But to be nourished by the Spirit is a daily thing. That's why Jesus says, 'Give us each day our daily bread.'

Illus: One of my mentors experienced it this way. When he was in college, he would wake up in the morning and pray very simply, 'Lord Jesus, by your Spirit please live your life out through me today.' One day, at the beginning of one term, he ran into a friend who was in need of some encouragement. Jesus Christ had a word of encouragement to speak through my mentor. A few months passed where the two didn't run into each other. When they did meet up some time later, the other guy talked about a problem he was facing. That day, Jesus Christ had a word of warning to speak to that friend. Another few months passed before my mentor ran into him again. This time, this friend held up his hands and said, 'NO!!! Every time I see you, God has something to say to me.' That simple prayer of asking, 'Lord Jesus, by your Spirit please live your life out through me today' is something we can all say every morning. That's what we find in the next few verses. Why can our prayers be so short? Because as Jesus says in the second section, God is more eager than a neighbor to help you host others.

### **God is More Eager Than a Hospitable Neighbor: v.5 – 8**

Let's take the second section. In v.5, Jesus tells a parable of the hospitable neighbor. 'Can any of you imagine having a friend, and going to him at midnight, and [in typical Ancient Near East fashion, not knock, but call from outside and] saying to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey and I have nothing to set before him.'

Now that seems weird when we first read it. Why would Jesus bring up this example??? It's important to highlight a few things about the cultural background of Jesus and the disciples. First, hospitality is the responsibility not just of the individual, but of the entire community. The entire community was expected to rally, share their bread, food, wine, and other things to be hospitable. This mentality is still present today. When I went to Israel on a business trip in late 1998, all of my Israeli associates in our work group rallied together. Each night, someone in the group either took me out or invited me into their home for an amazing meal. They had coordinated it so that each of them participated in hosting my visit.

Second, to not be hospitable and go out of your way for a guest in your community is big social no-no. It would be like not pitching in with everyone for a friend's birthday gift when the money was being collected and everyone is there. But it's all the more severe. It's shameful and embarrassing. Everyone participates in hosting a guest.

Third, no one serves just bread for a meal. Bread is not the meal. Bread is the fork, spoon, and knife with which the meal is eaten. Ethiopian cuisine is very much still like this; you break off some bread and use that to handle the food. What the hosting friend is hoping for is also cheese, olives, fruit, and wine, and the best pitcher, tray, tablecloth, and goblets that the community has to offer.

So Jesus throws us into this situation. Let's say a guest arrives at your place. You go asking for the smallest part of the meal because you don't want to be burdensome, you're not best friends with your neighbor, and maybe you want to understate your needs. But the expectation you have is, 'Of course this sleepy neighbor will help out. It's a minor inconvenience, but it's perfectly within the realm of possibility, and it's just a common social duty.'

But in v.7, Jesus throws in the surprise negative element. 'And from inside he shall answer and say, 'Do not bother me, the door has been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' That is a ridiculous excuse. It would be like saying, 'I've got to rearrange my sock drawer,' or 'Oh, my toe hurts so I can't get up.' To say, 'The door has been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything,' is absurd. No one says that. Therefore the answer to the rhetorical question is, 'No.' I cannot imagine that.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus describes the actual response this sleepy friend will give: 'I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because [or on the basis that] he is his friend, yet because [or on the basis] of his shame he will get up and give him as much as he needs.' It's his sense of shame that will compel him to get up and give him whatever he needs.

Unfortunately our Bibles translate this incorrectly. Both the NASB and the NRSV says, 'yet because of his **persistence** he will get up and give him whatever he needs.' Circle the word 'persistence.' If that is the right way to translate that word, it seem like you need to holler outside your sleepy neighbor's window to the point of being annoying. And by extension, it seems like Jesus is saying, 'God is like a sleepy friend that you need to annoy by praying repetitiously and annoyingly.' Now there is something in us that wants to believe that, isn't there? If our prayers for being empowered by the Spirit get answered, it's because we've persevered so long! But if the word is 'shame,' then we get the opposite view. The sleepy neighbor is motivated not by our persistence, but by his own sense of shame; he doesn't want to appear negligent in his social duty.

So why do I think it should be the second translation? First, the linguistic arguments. In ancient Greek literature, stretching from Archilochus in the seventh century BC, through Plato, Sophocles, and Herodotus in the fifth century BC to Epictetus in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, the word meant 'sense of shame.' In three ancient major papyri, the root word appears and clearly means 'shameful.' In the Septuagint Old Testament, Daniel 2:15 is translated, 'Why has the impudent [or shameful] decree come out from the face of the king.' In Josephus, the word exclusively means 'shameless' or 'impudent.' (see Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, p.199)

Second, the literary arguments. Jesus gave another parable on prayer in Luke 18:1-8 using the same 'how much more than' logic. There was a poor widow who annoyed an unjust judge so long, she finally got the judge to pay attention to her. But the point is, if the unjust judge finally responded to the widow, how much more will God respond to us? That's Jesus' point of contrast: 'Will not God bring about vindication for His elect...and will He delay long over them? [The rhetorical answer is NO!] I tell you that He will bring about vindication for them *speedily*.' The point is that God is NOT an unjust judge who doesn't care about us; He cares and will act *speedily*! So we don't have to feel like it's our persistence that will move Him to bring about vindication. Likewise in Luke 11, God is NOT like the sleepy friend who offers ridiculous excuses, so it's not our persistence that moves Him to empower us by the Holy Spirit.

Looking locally, the rest of the passage has nothing to do with persistence, but with God's desire to answer prayer quickly. Verses 9-10, the 'ask, seek, knock' passage has no sense of persisting and waiting. And in v.11-13, God is even more willing to give the Holy Spirit to His children than earthly fathers are willing to give food to their children.

Third, the cultural argument. If the community owns hospitality and not just the individual host, and if failing to help out is shameful, it makes all the sense in the world to translate this, 'sense of shame.' It appears that the later Greek and Latin translators of the church did not understand how to translate 'sense of shame' because they didn't

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<sup>1</sup> Jesus seems to have used rhetorical questions like this a lot. The phrase, 'Can any of you imagine' is repeated in Luke three other times. In each case, Jesus expects the answer to be no. 'Can any one among you imagine a son falling into a well and he shall not immediately draw him upon the sabbath day?' (14:5) 'Can any one among you imagine having a hundred sheep and having lost one of them, not leaving the ninety-nine in the wilderness and going after the one that is lost?' (15:4) 'Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep, say to him when he has come in from the field, Come at once and sit down at table?' (17:7). In each case, it's an emphatic NO. So however this sleepy neighbor hypothetically responds, we're expect to answer, 'No, we can't imagine that happening.'

understand the Israelite culture of hospitality that Jesus was drawing upon. Thus, they shifted the meaning of the Greek word to persistence, and that influence has lasted until today.

So what is Jesus saying about your sleepy friend? He will get up, if not on the basis of being your friend, then on the basis of social pressure and social convention, i.e. his sense of shame. He will not get up because you are persistent, but because he wants to save face. What will your sleepy friend give you? Not just bread, but notice v.8? Whatever you need! Bread, wine, cheese, olives, fruit, meat, a cloth and even a serving plate.

More importantly, what is Jesus saying about God? God is not motivated by persistence from external people, as if He just wants to not be bothered anymore. He's motivated by a force internal to His character: His love for us. And He's motivated by something stronger than a sense of shame or a self-protective desire to save face. It's real love, people! He can nourish you by His Spirit to love others.

Illus: About a year ago, a friend of mine told me that he and his wife had separated. This was a total shock. I had known them both from college. I knew that they had gone to counseling and had challenges, but I thought things were getting better. My friend told me that she had become consistently physically violent, so much so that the older two of their four kids had finally called the police. Turns out that she had developed mental health issues and had at least one affair. So my friend took out a restraining order against his own wife, so she had to live separately. He worked out a way for her to still see the kids, almost every day. He had hoped that she would agree to get more counseling, and to meet with a mediator. But instead, she decided to start the divorce proceedings. Then, she discovered that she had breast cancer. I've always admired my friend before because of his love for Jesus. Over the past few months, I can't tell you how much more I've come to admire him. He lowered the restraining order to peaceful contact so that he could care for her post-surgery and post-chemo. He suggested that she hit the pause button on the divorce proceedings so that she could stay on his insurance plan. At first she said yes, then said no. He took over all the driving so that the kids could still see their mom, because she can't drive because of the chemotherapy. And he's walked with each of his four kids, attentively and carefully. How could he be this generous? He said there have been times during this season when he has never felt closer to Jesus. Jesus has nourished him by his Spirit, and given him the resources to nourish others. His human love would have failed long ago. But Jesus' love has not run out.

I hope you never face that situation. But I tell you that story because I want you to have a clear and sober picture of what it means to bear the character of God's family. You need a daily discipline of asking for your daily bread of God's Spirit.

### **God Is More Eager Than Earthly Fathers: v.9 – 13**

Jesus says in v.9 – 10, 'And I say to you, ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened. For everyone who asks, receives; and everyone who seeks, finds, and to the one who knocks, it shall be opened.' Jesus is not talking about asking God for just anything. If that were true, then who would win? Your parents who want you to play violin? Or you, who wants to play. Again, Jesus is referring to a type of prayer that is specifically rooted in wanting more of the Holy Spirit.

Then Jesus gives a second illustration of God hearing our prayers in v.11 – 13. 'Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?'

Again Jesus gives us an argument from extremes. Of course we're not going to give our children a snake or a scorpion, especially when they've asked for food! Who would do that? No one. Likewise God is not going to give us something evil or disempowering. He's not going to give us something that doesn't satisfy and nourish us and make us strong. But, if human parents are evil and give this much, how much more will God, who is good, give His children what is good???

Do you see the logic running through this passage? How can our prayers be so simple and short? Because it doesn't depend on you, or how nice and long your prayers are. It depends on the Father's eagerness to answer those prayers! Look, if a sleeping neighbor will get out of bed because of his sense of shame, how much more will God as Father leap at the chance to respond to you? And, if earthly fathers who are evil and sometimes really screw up their

kids still know how to give nourishing food, how much more will God, who has no shred of evil in Him, give us a banquet of the Holy Spirit?!?

Illus: This is Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend, and every year, I read something from his writings. In his book, *Strength to Love*, Dr. King writes about coming to Montgomery to lead the bus boycott. Right after the protest, King and his wife got all kinds of phone calls and letters threatening their lives. After one such phone call, King says, 'I hung up, but I could not sleep. It seemed that all of my fears had come down on me at once. I had reached the saturation point. I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. Finally, I went to the kitchen and heated a pot of coffee. I was ready to give up. I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing to be a coward. In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had almost gone, I determined to take my problem to [Jesus]. My head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud, '...The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left...' At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never before experienced him. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice, saying, 'Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever.' ...Three nights later, our home was bombed. Strangely enough, I accepted the word of the bombing calmly. My experience with [Jesus] had given me a new strength and trust. I knew now that [Jesus] is able to give us the interior resources to face the storms and problems of this life.' (Martin Luther King, Jr., 'Our God is Able', *Strength to Love*)

How many of you are heading into a situation this semester where you feel like you have no resources? Somehow you become the nastiest you can be? How many of you have old friendships that bring up old feelings and patterns? Or some family drama? How many of you feel discouraged because ministry is harder than you thought? How many of you feel like not praying for more of God's Spirit because you think God is stingy about His personal resources?

Illus: I've told my daughter recently that one of my heroes is a woman named Ginger Whitacre. Ginger married her high school sweetheart Mark Whitacre. But after 26 years of marriage, she turned him over to the FBI. Mark worked for a huge food ingredients company called Archer Daniel Midlands, or ADM. ADM was stealing billions of dollars by price fixing, and Mark was in on it. The FBI started to investigate people, including Mark. Ginger loved her husband, but she Jesus first and foremost. She also loved the truth and the people in her community – she knew some of them were being robbed, and many others. So she prayed to Jesus for strength. Then she told her husband, 'Either you turn yourself into the FBI, or I will do it for you.' She wanted him to become the person God always intended him to be, filled by the Spirit and joined to Jesus so he could live in the integrity and love of God. So one night, as the FBI agent left their house without Mark having said anything, Ginger walked right out after him. Mark had to run out after her! He had to confess, and became one of the highest level corporate whistleblowers of all time. He became an informant for the FBI against that company, which is why a movie was made of him called *The Informant*, and Matt Damon played him. But Mark was also guilty for participating in fraud and embezzlement. He went to jail for it. But Ginger continued to feast on the Spirit of God, and hold out the Spirit of Jesus to him. During his time in jail, Mark finally stopped his shallow churchgoing and really gave his life to Jesus. Isn't that amazing?! By the Spirit of Jesus, Mark Whitacre is a transformed man, and is still being transformed. But Ginger is the real hero. Mark even says that. Because she was nourished by God's love, not even her husband's love primarily, and because she prayed for the Spirit of Jesus to pour the life and love of Jesus through her into this terrible situation. Throughout all that time, Ginger stood by him, in love but in truth. She called him to be who God had always made him to be. She was who God made her to be. Justice was done. AND they are still married!!

God the Father is not stingy!!! Now He doesn't guarantee that your parents won't get that divorce. He doesn't guarantee that you will just sail through life. But He does guarantee that He will nourish you with His love. And you'll need him. Because your generation is facing every kind of crisis we can imagine: global warming, the global energy crisis, the global water crisis, the food crisis, the crisis of new diseases, corruption in politics, corruption in our financial system, corruption in the criminal justice system, growing economic inequality, racism still. Where will you go to run and hide from all this? Which one of you will be untouched by the evils of our day? Where will you go to run and hide from the way your parents raised you? And at the same time, your generation has been called the least empathetic. You've been the most marketed to, have the most customized things sold to you, and the most spoiled. You are afraid to fail because you already think so highly of yourself. You need the Spirit of the

other-centered Jesus. You need the other-centered Father who loves YOU, and loves OTHERS THROUGH YOU. The future of this planet hangs on it! So may all those things about this generation not be said of you!!

Jesus is saying that, in regards to the Father giving you the Holy Spirit, it doesn't matter how long or how eloquently you pray. Because I didn't expost the short prayer in the beginning of this passage might make you feel like I'm belittling prayer, I'm not spending a lot of time defining it, considering it, etc. I don't want to belittle prayer at all; prayer is non-negotiable. BUT, you can have a high view of prayer because you have a low view of God's eagerness to respond to you AND a high view of yourself or the particular prayer tradition you come from.

So when you visit home, or when you step back into that sticky friendship, when you're discouraged about your own failures, when you feel like the Christian life is not exciting, understand that this is exactly the type of prayer that God is eager to respond to. He jumps at the chance. So pray, 'Lord, by your Spirit who already lives in me by my faith in Jesus Christ, fill my life to overflowing. Pour out the life of Christ through me.'

What are some barriers we have to praying like this? The first barrier we might have is not having a high view of Christian love. The host could have just hung a sign on his door that said, 'No visitors welcome.' That way, he would have never had to ask for help. There are ways in which you might be unwelcoming to others because you don't want to be burdened. You don't want to be put into the position where you have to ask God for help. But as Jesus does live his life out through us, he will bring us to people who are frightening and scary for us to interact with. And he'll say, 'I want to love this person through you.'

Another barrier is that we think God wants to crush our hunger for significance rather than redirect it. That's totally wrong. God wants to redirect our hunger for significance. I've learned from being a father that I want my son to feel like his life is significant, but not on his own terms, on God's. The reason Ming and I named our kids horribly and painfully long names. They're going to hate us when they take their SAT's and have to fill out those bubbles. Our son is John Athanasius Yang-Guang Nagasawa. John, because it means God is gracious, and because we love the Gospel of John. It's also my grandfather's English name, and Ming's dad's English name. Athanasius because that's the name of the brilliant and courageous fourth century theologian who defended the deity of Jesus in the face of the entire Roman Empire when it followed the Aryan heresy. Yang-Guang because it means 'looking towards the light,' and that's how we hope his life will be focused. Nagasawa means 'long swamp'! A good dose of humility there. Apparently we didn't own good land back in the old country! Zoe is the Greek word for 'God's life.' Anastacia is the Greek word for 'resurrection.' So when Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life,' in John 11, he said, 'I am the *anastasis* and the *zoe*.' Jen-Guang is her Chinese name, and that means 'true light.' And once again, Nagasawa. Now if I as a father want my kids to live significant, meaningful, empowered lives that live up to their names, how much more does God want that for all His children?!? But the big difference comes here. I can only be to my kids the image of the true Father. God is the true and ultimate Father.

Another barrier is that you're afraid you'll be rejected. The host who needs bread might have been afraid of asking for help. Same goes for the children with their fathers. We may have had demanding and exacting authority figures in our lives before, such that that if you ask him for three loaves of bread, that He'll give you exactly three loaves of bread. 'There you go, that's what you asked for!!! And no more!!!' But God is not that way. Jesus' resounding point here is that the Father LONGS EAGERLY to give us the strength and significance we ask for. So don't just ask for the bare minimum of emotional or spiritual resources you need. Don't just ask for three loaves of bread because you think that's all God will give you or because you don't want to reveal that you're needy. Ask God for everything you need. Go to Him at any time. Midnight, 4am, it doesn't make a difference. He never sleeps. He never slumbers.

God is the Father who says that He will never leave or forsake you. He is a Father who doesn't push you out of the nest so you can fly on your own; He goes with you, nourishing you the whole way, strengthening every fiber in your heart, every bone in your body, every synapse in your brain with the fact that HE IS WITH YOU IN THE PERSON OF HIS SPIRIT!!!