

Born to Win

The Words of Jesus #29

by Ronald L. Dart

Why should it be all that hard to pray? There's no trouble praying when you're in a lot of difficulties or you're hanging upside down by one foot in a well somewhere and afraid you're going to die. You can pray quickly and easily, "Lord, help me!" That's easy. And we probably have some childhood prayers that we memorized. The first prayer I can recall is, "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake. I pray the Lord my soul to take." And then I added a few "God bless Mother, God bless Daddy" and so forth at the end of the prayer. One thing about that: I'm still not sure why someone thought little kids should be praying about dying in their sleep. I can tell you, that gave me a few bad moments when I was growing up. But I gather prayer must not be all that simple, because the disciples of Jesus came to him and said:

Luke 11

AKJV

¹ [...] Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.

Now, what he *gave* them is *utter simplicity*. He gave them what you and I know it as the Lord's Prayer. "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name", and all that goes with it. You know, with a little simplification, that's a *far* better prayer for kids to memorize than, "If I should die before I wake". But, in any case, the question the disciples asked led to a discourse *beyond* the Lord's Prayer, and it raised some fascinating questions. Because after giving them the Lord's Prayer, Jesus continued with this illustration. It's found in Luke 11 and verse five.

Luke 11

AKJV

⁵ And he said to them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves;

⁶ For a friend of my in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?

⁷ And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; [...]

I guess that was the custom—you lined up your children across the bed at your feet, and your wife's in bed—you don't want to wake up the kids.

Luke 5

AKJV

⁷ [...] my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give you.

⁸ I say to you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needs.

In other words: to get rid of him. The fact that the guy keeps knocking and says, “I’m not going away, Paul. Get up. Give me the bread.” “Go away! You’re going to wake up the kids!” “No, I’m not going away get up and give me the bread.” They’re not good enough friends for him to get up in the middle of night but he will do it to get rid of him.

Luke 5

AKJV

⁹ And I say to you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.

¹⁰ For every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened.

Now, how do we take that? Well, in context, there’s only one way to understand this. He that keeps on asking will receive, and to him that keeps on knocking it shall be opened. In the context of what Jesus is saying, it isn’t just that you ask, it’s that you *persist* in asking. It’s almost as though it’s saying God may not give it to you because he likes you, he may give it to you because he wants to get you to stop coming to him. I don’t think that’s the way we’re to take this, but that’s the illustration that Christ used.

But why is it necessary? Why do we have to persevere—to agonize—in prayer? Why do we have to keep coming back again and again and again? Why can’t we just ask one time and receive? Well, I heard a preacher once talk about prayer, and he talked about prayer being a part of his daily life. He said, “When I come out of the railroad station. I walk over the curb and I say, ‘Lord, get me a taxi.’” Now, look, consider the implications of that for a moment. God isn’t our servant. It’s supposed to be the other way around. What kind of a world is this going to be if you and I can ask God once and then God hops-to and gives us exactly what we want, every time, when we ask him, Johnny-on-the-spot? God becomes *our* servant in that situation instead of us being his.

I think one of the reasons why we have to keep going back to God again and again and again is because, in the process of time, we may come to understand more deeply the issues: what’s at stake; what may come to pass as a result of the thing that we’re asking God. It’s entirely possible that, when you’ve asked God for the same thing seven days in the week, you may at the end of that period of time come to understand yourself: A) You don’t need it. B) It isn’t all that important. or C) It would really be a bad idea. The idea in this little illustration is that if this guy can’t get any rest he’ll get up and give us what we want to get rid of us, so he can go back to sleep. We’ve become an *irritant* to get what we want. It’s a little hard to think in terms of irritating God. I’m not very much into that. It’s also hard to imagine that he will give us what we want just to get rid of us. But here’s this little story, and the lesson of it is as clear as crystal: You’ve got to persevere in prayer. My problem is that I’ve always thought that God always *knows* what I need before I ask, and he knows what’s best for me, and what’s the point in going on about it? But then, I’m the kind of guy who hates to put a waiter in a restaurant to too much trouble. And yet, Jesus taught his disciples to persevere in prayer. Maybe...maybe we ought to *just do it* and figure it out later. Jesus continued:

Luke 11

AKJV

¹¹ If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?

¹² Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?

¹³ If you then, being evil, [...]

And that’s kind of a relative term he’s using, concerning his disciples.

Luke 11

AKJV

¹³ 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 them that ask him?

You know, it might be worth taking note here: It's not a taxi we're asking for. We're asking for the Holy Spirit—the *power* behind the Big Bang, the *power* that God used in creating the universe, the *power* that he empowered the disciples with on the Day of Pentecost. That's what we're asking for. And, you know, in the process of coming back to God again and again and again, our understanding of our *own* needs will grow deeper; our understanding of the needs of others will grow clearer; and our desire, sometimes, to please God may also grow stronger.

As Jesus and his disciples were walking, they came across a man who was blind. They knew who he was, the disciples did, because this man had been blind from birth. Can you imagine that? Here you are—you're a grown man—and in all your lifetime you've never seen your mother's face, have never seen a sunrise or sunset, never seen a cloud against a blue sky. You've never seen the face of a beautiful woman. You've never seen *any* of these things. Your world is just sound and touch and smell. I can imagine it up to a point, but no one can possibly imagine what that's like who hasn't been there. The disciples saw this as a theological question—which is always fascinating to me, that people can take the maimed and the blind and the halt and sick people of every stripe, and they can sit down next to them and discuss theology about sickness and blindness and so forth. They don't have the *feeling*, it seems, for the person who is sick and who is in this condition.

John 9

AKJV

² And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

The prevailing wisdom of the time was that, if you were sick, you had sinned and there was some reason why this terrible thing had happened to you. And this reached in every corner of society: If you were poor, well, God had cursed you. If you're rich, God had blessed you. If you were fat, God had blessed you. If you were starving to death, God had cursed you—and so on it went. So here's a man born blind. "Well, it couldn't *possibly* be because of *his sin* that he was born blind...or maybe it was his parents", and his disciples wanted to know.

John 9

AKJV

³ Jesus answered, Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

Now, in the first place, the disciples had not yet tumbled to the fact that a lot of bad things happen to ordinary and good people in the world that just are time and chance. They are *not* because the person has done something bad. And, secondly, Jesus seems almost to imply that this man was allowed to be born blind—and placed at this time, in this place—so that Jesus could heal him; so that the *works of God* could be made manifest in the man. Jesus went on to say:

John 9

AKJV

⁴ I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night comes, when no man can work.

⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

And he seems to have some symbolic meaning in what he just said.

John 9

AKJV

⁶ When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay,

⁷ And said to him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed[....]

And, as he washed his eyes, he could see water, and then he could see the people around him, and the sky, and the clouds. He could *see*. What an astonishing day that must have been for this man—to have never seen. You know, they tell me that there had to be a miracle here, not only in the eyes, but in the brain—that we actually have to *learn* to see and this man, having never seen, got it *all*.

John 9

AKJV

⁸ The neighbors therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged?

⁹ Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: [...]

And the man, who heard them muttering about who he was, said, “No, no.”:

John 9

AKJV

⁹ [...] I am he.

¹⁰ Therefore said they to him, How were your eyes opened?

¹¹ He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said to me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight.

¹² Then said they to him, Where is he? He said, I know not.

You know what’s amazing about this, at this moment of time? This man could not pick Jesus out of a lineup, because he had never seen him. It’s almost as though Jesus set this up so that the man would go away and wash somewhere else and would then be able to see, *never having laid eyes on Jesus at all*, as he bears testimony to what happened. This is a *really unusual* passage of scripture here. If you want to look it up and study it, it’s in the ninth chapter of John.

John 9

KJ2000

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees him that formerly was blind.

¹⁴ And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes.

Ah, there’s the rub. Because, you see, to actually spit and then to make clay—well, making clay, that’s work—and you can’t work on the Sabbath Day. Well, the Pharisees wanted to know:

John 9

KJ2000

¹⁵ [...] how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon my eyes, and I washed, and do see.

¹⁶ Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keeps not the sabbath day. [...]

Oh, dear. You know, you really wonder sometimes how people can take something which God intended to be a *release* and turn it into a *burden* because the Sabbath Commandment (which is the Fourth Commandment)—there's not anything that difficult about it. What it tells you is: take a day off! Stop working. You know, just take a day off, spend some time in your family. Don't make anybody by your family work. Don't make your slaves work. Don't make your *animals* work; give your ox the day off. Rest everything. My goodness, they've even found, apparently, that resting the jackasses that take people down to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and back up makes them live longer: give them one day a week off and they live longer.

So here's the Sabbath day—designed to give man rest and freedom from burdens and so forth—and along comes Jesus, who does one tiny little piece of work (which really doesn't qualify), makes clay and heals this man, and all they can talk about is *religion*. They can't ponder what it means to be born blind. They can't imagine what it's like to go wandering around all your life, running into things and being led around by the hand. They can't imagine, in their own minds, what it's like to have to depend on only your sense of hearing and your sense of smell and touch. They can't imagine any of that. All they are concerned about is their religious rules. Other people said to the Pharisees, "Well, now, wait a minute":

John 9

KJ2000

- ¹⁶ [...] How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them.
¹⁷ They said unto the blind man again, What say you of him, that he has opened your eyes? He said, He is a prophet.
¹⁸ But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, [...]

They said, "No, no! This can't be true. This is a fraud." So they went and got his parents.

John 9

KJ2000

- ¹⁹ And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who you say was born blind? how then does he now see?
²⁰ His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind:
²¹ But by what means he now sees, we know not; or who has opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself.
²² These words spoke his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.
²³ Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him.
²⁴ Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner.
²⁵ He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or not, I know not:[...]

And, of course, he couldn't very well. He'd never laid eyes on him. He *assumed* the man was a prophet because surely being able to heal him counted for *something*. So he said, "I don't really know whether he's a sinner or not. *But*":

John 9

KJ2000

- ²⁵ [...] one thing I know, that, though I was blind, now I see.

It's hard to argue with that "I have my facts straight on this one thing", he said.

John 9

KJ2000

²⁶ Then said they to him again, What did he do to you? [*Now, we want to get this story straight.*] how opened he your eyes?

²⁷ He answered them, I have told you already, and you did not hear: why would you hear it again? will you also be his disciples?

Oh, this is *rich* with sarcasm, because this fellow here—he’s about had enough of it. It’s amazing. You know, it can give you a lot of confidence: you’ve sat around blind for year after year after year and, all of a sudden, *now you can see* and you’re just not in the mood to take a lot of stuff from people who are willing to gainsay say what’s happened. “I know one thing: I was blind. I see. What’s the big deal here, fellas? You want to be his disciples, too?”

John 9

KJ2000

²⁸ Then they reviled him, and said, You are his disciple; but we are Moses’ disciples.

²⁹ We know that God spoke unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from where he is.

And the man, who is really getting teed off about this, says:

John 9

KJ2000

³⁰ [...] Why, in this is a marvelous thing, that you know not from where he is, and yet he has opened my eyes.

³¹ Now we know that God hears not sinners: but if any man be a worshiper of God, and does his will, him he hears.

Listen, this is the man who was born blind still speaking.

John 9

KJ2000

³² Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.

³³ If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.

Boy, the tension must have been heavy in that room, at that time. You could have heard a pin drop after this man finished that speech. But they finally answered and said:

John 9

KJ2000

³⁴ You were altogether born in sins, and do you teach us? [...]

What do you mean, he was “born in sin”. Well, the presumption, folks, is he was born blind so he was born in sin—either him or his parents in some way. And, having said that:

John 9

KJ2000

³⁴ [...] they cast him out [of the synagogue].

I guess this proves that, to some people, their religion is more important than the *real working* of God in the world.

John 9

KJ2000

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Do you believe on the Son of God?

³⁶ He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?

Bear in mind, this poor guy still doesn't know what's going on.

John 9

KJ2000

³⁷ And Jesus said unto him, You have both seen him, and it is he that talks with you.

Now, for the first time, he actually looks into the face of the one that healed him.

John 9

KJ2000

³⁸ And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshiped him.

³⁹ And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they who see not might see; and that they who see might be made blind.

⁴⁰ And some of the Pharisees who were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also?

⁴¹ Jesus said unto them, If you were blind, you should have no sin: but now you say, We see; therefore your sin remains.

You people ought to know better.

There were still a number of Pharisees standing around when Jesus finished this saying in the end of the ninth chapter of John, and so he launches into another allegory. He said:

John 10

KJ2000

¹ Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that enters not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

Now, here we are in the 21st century, and most of us are pretty well divorced from sheep, but, you know, if someone comes in the front door of the house—just opens the door, comes on in and bangs around, and says, “Hi.”—we don't worry about. But the guy who's climbing up and coming up the trellis and trying to come in the bedroom window—*that's* the guy we worry about. This is a simple illustration; anybody can understand that. He says in verse two:

John 9

KJ2000

² But he that enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

³ To him the gatekeeper opens; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out.

Now, it takes a *pretty special* kind of guy to be a shepherd and to know those sheep by name. I mean, sheep are, well, they're *sheep*, and they run around in flocks, and there's a bunch of them. It's pretty hard to imagine; they all look alike to me. But, I suppose, if you spent a lot of time with them in the field, and you are there when they're giving birth to the lambs, and you carry the little lambs on your shoulder, that you probably do get to know them. And I guess it's convenient to give them a name. Anyway, he takes his sheep and puts them out to pasture:

John 10

KJ2000

⁴ And when he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

It's funny how these little critters and animals and so forth get to know us, isn't? They get to know us; they recognize our voice; they can tell when we're calling. And they hear our voice, they come. They hear somebody else's voice...dogs do it—they'll come to *you*, but when they hear someone else's voice, well, they bark.

John 10

KJ2000

⁵ And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

And that's the end of the allegory—all there is to it.

John 10

KJ2000

⁶ This parable spoke Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spoke unto them.

They didn't get—didn't know what he was talking about—which is one of the reasons why he spoke in allegories. And then he went at it another way. He said:

John 10

KJ2000

⁷ [...] Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

⁸ All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

⁹ I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

¹⁰ The thief comes not, but to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

¹¹ I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.

¹² But he that is a hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees: and the wolf catches them, and scatters the sheep.

¹³ The hireling flees, because he is a hireling [*He cares about his salary. He cares about his money.*], and cares not for the sheep.

And there's a funny thing, as I said before, about these little critters—that, in spite of ourselves, we do come to care for them, don't we? You know, according to this, the relationship between Jesus and his "sheep"—however he means that to be taken—is that he *cares* for them, calls them by name, knows who they are, They recognize his voice; they follow him wherever he goes. He said:

John 10

KJ2000

¹⁴ I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

¹⁵ As the Father knows me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

“Oh, and by the way, you should know this, also.” (Remember the Pharisees are still standing there.)

John 10

KJ2000

¹⁶ And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

Here is another one of those instances where Jesus is *plainly*...I say “plainly”—plainly in hindsight. I don’t know that very many people standing listening to him got it. But with hindsight he is *plainly* making a reference to the fact that the Gospel is going to go to the Gentiles—that “this fold” is Israel and those “other sheep” of other folds are the Gentiles. And he said, “I’m going to bring them all together and there will be one fold and one shepherd. And you’re not going to stand around with Gentiles standing over there and the Jews standing over there and thinking that you don’t *both* belong to me. One fold. One shepherd.”

John 10

KJ2000

¹⁷ Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.

¹⁸ No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

It’s a strange thing to consider, in a way, but throughout his ministry, wherever he went, there were people who were *drawn* to him and there were people who *turned away* from him. Why? Well, Jesus seems to imply in other places that those whom his Father had given to him—those whom his Father had sent to him—would come to him, and the others would not. It has to also, though, have something to do with the *heart* of the people. The people who knew God—people who were obedient to God, people who knew the Father, people who studied the Bible and followed the laws of the Bible—when they heard Jesus speak would have known who he was. They would have recognized his word was true. They would have followed. And then there were the others—those *losers* who had turned religion into a straitjacket, who had made the law an *end in itself* instead of a *means* to worship God and to understand God.

How about you? Do you recognize the voice of Jesus...or is it the voice of a stranger?

Until next time, this is Ronald Dart.

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