

SERMON: "SHAMELESS AUDACITY BEFORE GOD"

by

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SERMON

Submitted to Dr. Grant Osborne
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the class
NT 6221: Synoptic Gospels & Johannine Literature
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Deerfield, IL
December 1, 2010

CAMPUS BOX: T-1778

Sermon
“Shameless Audacity Before God”
Luke 11:1-13

Intended audience: I wrote this as if it were a sermon that I was going to deliver to my own congregation, DeerGrove Covenant Church in Palatine, Illinois. DeerGrove has approximately 80-100 people on Sundays, mostly middle-aged adults, many of them fellow parents. The speaker usually talks for 30-40 minutes.

Introduction—Today, I'm going to ask us to learn from our children. Because I have one daughter, a girl who is three years old, and she teaches me about God all the time. I want to start out by explaining why I think it's worth it to let children teach us.

1. Later in the Gospel of Luke from the passage we're going to discuss today, Jesus mentions that whosoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it (Luke 18:17)
2. Charles Hodge: “The conduct and language of our Lord in reference to children are not to be regarded as matters of sentiment, or simply expressive of kindly feeling. He evidently looked upon them as the lambs of the flock for which, as the good Shepherd, He laid down his life, and of whom He said they shall never perish, and no man could pluck them out of his hands. Of such He tells us is the kingdom of heaven, as though heaven was, in great measure, composed of the souls of redeemed infants.” (HST: 27)
3. Christmas 2009, my daughter Harley and her Thomas the Tank Engine Trains (see **Appendix A**, p. 10)

Proposition—God wants us to bring our needs before him in prayer

1. We do so in fulfillment of our divine adoption as sons and daughters of God
2. Jesus exhorts us to be audacious and bold in bringing our requests before God
3. However, God is not a vending machine who gives us anything we want. We have to ask for the right things. Good things.
4. God has something very specific that he wants to give us.

Context—That Jesus prayed to his Father in heaven regularly is something that Luke has often focused on up until this point (5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28). Marshall: “Prayer is a main theme in this teaching rather than something which is mentioned only incidentally.” (LHT: 204)

1. Many evangelicals: Do not actively and regularly pray to God. Figure that if God already knows their needs before they ask, there's little point in asking

2. Prosperity preachers: You can ask God for whatever you want, including wealth and prestige, and if you're faithful and persistent, God will give it to you

Exposition—As follows:

- I. After Jesus finishes praying, the disciples ask him to teach them to pray, v. 1
 - A. The significance of the disciples' request
 1. Did the disciples not know how to pray before this?
 2. Origen: “Are we then to conclude that a man who was brought up in the instruction of the law, who heard the words of the prophets and did not fail to attend the synagogue, did not know how to pray until he saw the Lord praying 'in a certain place'? It would certainly be foolish to say this.” (*On Prayer* 2.4; as cited in ACL: 185)
 - B. The key to understanding this request: “Teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples,” v. 1b
 1. González: “At the time . . . many other rabbis and teachers proposed certain prayers for their disciples to repeat . . . Such prayers were also signs of identification among disciples of the same teacher” (GCL: 143).
 2. Therefore, repetition of the Lord's Prayer (v. 2-4) is the identifying mark of disciples of Jesus Christ.
- II. Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer (11:2-4), found also in Matthew 6:9-13
 - A. Jesus teaches his disciples to call God “Father” for the first time, v. 2a
 1. Jesus has just prayed to God as “Father” for the first time in Luke's Gospel in the preceding chapter, 10:21-22.
 2. Cyril of Alexandria attributes deep salvific significance to this gesture, anticipating the believers' forthcoming adoption as sons and daughters of God:
 - a. “He gives his own glory to us. He raises slaves to the dignity of freedom. He crowns the human condition with such honor as surpasses the power of nature. He brings to pass what was spoken of old by the voice of the psalmist: 'I said, you are gods, and all of you children of the most high.' He rescues us from the measure of slavery, giving us by his grace what we did not possess by nature, and permits us to call God 'Father,' as being admitted to the ranks of sons [and daughters].”

(*Commentary on Luke, Homily 71*; ACL: 185)

3. When we participate in the Lord's Prayer and call God "Father," we accept his offer to be adopted as his sons and daughters and become what Jesus is.

B. Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer slightly differs from Matthew's

1. Luke omits "your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10b), possibly because this is already implied by "your kingdom come" (Luke 11:2b; Matt. 6:10a).
2. Luke also omits "but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6:13b), but again, this outcome is implied by "Lead us not into temptation" (Luke 11:4b; Matt. 6:13a).
3. Luke changes forgiveness of debts and debtors (Matt. 6:12) to the related concept of forgiveness of sins and those who sin against us (Luke 11:4).

C. What is meant by "daily bread"? (v. 3)

1. The word for "daily," ἐπιούσιος (*epiousios*) occurs here and in Matt. 6:11. This word is unique to Matthew and Luke and occurs nowhere else in antiquity.
2. Tannehill: It can mean bread for today (hence "daily bread"), bread for the coming day, or only as much bread as is necessary for subsistence (TCL: 188)
3. It is important that we honor God (v. 2a), live like the kingdom is here now (v. 2b), and forgive others of their sins against us (v. 4), but the overall theme for the remainder of this passage is how to request that "daily bread" from God.

III. The Shamelessly Audacious Neighbor (11:5-8)

A. These four verses contain a story that is entirely unique to Luke.

1. Often called "the persistent neighbor;" I've upgraded this to "the shamelessly audacious neighbor" for a reason.
2. The story is a long and involved question wherein Jesus is asking his disciples, "Which of you would behave like this?" in anticipation of the answer, "No one."
 - a. Tannehill: "The man's request for bread, even if inconvenient, will not be refused." (TCL: 189)

B. The neighbor's request, v.5-6

1. Ancient hospitality conventions expected that neighbors would provide for one another's emergency needs whenever possible; however, demanding assistance at midnight would have been pushing it.
2. The man making the request is also expected to uphold these rules of hospitality by providing for the traveler that has come to him, even though it is midnight.
3. González: The audacious neighbor is “caught between two principles of conduct: hospitality to the unexpected guest on the one hand, and respect for the friend who sleeps on the other” (GCL: 145). He chooses to honor the former.
4. Ambrose believed that the request for three loaves was symbolic of the “heavenly mysteries,” i. e. the Trinity (*Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 7.87*; as cited in ACL: 189).
 - a. This will become relevant later in v. 13, when we learn what it is, specifically, that God wants to give us.

C. The sleeping neighbor's reply, v. 7

1. Literally, “my children are with me in bed.” There is apparently only one room for sleeping in this house, and the audacious neighbor has disturbed the entire family by rousing the father to help him.

D. Verse 8—the neighbor will get what he wants because of “his shameless audacity.”

1. The Greek word here is ἀναίδεια (*anadeia*): “shamelessness, impudence”
 - a. Some translations have tepidly rendered it “persistence.” It is stronger than that, “the negative quality of one who offends social standards” (TCL: 188).
 - b. However, the Greek pronouns are ambiguous so that it could refer to the “shamelessness” of the sleeping neighbor; that he agrees to give the man bread out of a desire to preserve his good name.
 - c. I agree with Tannehill (TCL: 189) that the first reading better fits the overall message of the passage.
2. The TNIV nicely renders ἀναίδεια as the neighbor's “shameless audacity” in making his request and persevering to see it fulfilled.

Illustration: When you think of this parable, you need to remember that God does not sleep. We do not wake him up in the middle of the night when we come to him with our requests, nor is he surprised by the things that we ask for. He knows our needs before we ever ask for them, and he *still* wants us to ask for them.

IV. Jesus exhorts his disciples to be shamelessly audacious in going before God with their requests, v. 11:9-10.

A. This portion of the passage is paralleled almost word-for-word by Matt. 7:7-8.

B. Jesus' exhortation makes heavy use of rhythmic repetition in urging his followers to come before God in prayer.

1. Asking, seeking and knocking are all the same action. Receiving, finding and having the door opened are all the same results.
2. While it is possible that “human requests to God may show ignorance and pettiness, this passage seems to deal with a different problem: an unwillingness to ask, out of fear or deference” (TCL: 190).
3. Shameless audacity before other human beings may be a bad thing, but God welcomes his children to be bold and persistent, even shameless, in making their requests before him.

Illustration: Now go back to that story I told you in the beginning about my daughter. Let me tell you, when my daughter was asking for her Thomas the Tank Engine trains for Christmas, she was bold and persistent in making her requests. She never took “no” for an answer, and her audacity paid off. She's too young to understand that I'm human and her requests can wear me out. But God is not me, and our requests will never wear him out.

V. What kind of father would give his son a bad gift? v. 11-12

A. Closely paralleled by Matt. 7:9-10

1. Luke and Matthew both use the example of fish (good gift) v. snake (bad gift).
2. However, the second example in Luke is egg v. scorpion. In Matthew, the fish v. snake is the second example; the first is bread v. stone.
3. As with v. 5-7, a shorter series of “who among you” questions which anticipate the answer “no one.”

B. Pushback—The passage uses the example of children who ask for good gifts. But

do children ever ask for bad gifts?

1. As almost any parent could tell you, YES.

Illustration: My daughter asks for snakes and scorpions all the time. She loves drinking soda and juice and eating candy. She thinks these things are good for her, but as the responsible parent that I like to pretend I am, I have to tell her “no” because they’ll rot her teeth. I can’t give her those snakes and scorpions she keeps requesting; I want to give her only good things.

C. Pushback—Do children ever ask for bad gifts when they are passionately, firmly convinced that those gifts are good things that they really need?

1. Answer: Most definitely YES.

Illustration: The story of my white tights (see **Appendix B**, p. 11)

2. Sometimes, we think we want something from God so badly. From our perspective, we’re direly convinced that it’s what we need and we’re outraged at God when he refuses to make it happen. But God has an eternal perspective. He sees things that we do not and never can see, and he only wants to give us *good* gifts. Sometimes, he says “no” to us because that thing that we think we need is only going to hurt us in the long run, like going to school in just a t-shirt and tights.

VI. What God wants to give us, and why, v. 13

A. Verse 13a—“If you then, though you are evil”

1. Recalls the point of the analogy that was laid out in v. 5-8.
 - a. The point is not that God is like the sleeping neighbor who only helps his friend reluctantly after being nagged into it.
 - b. The point is, if that’s how *humans* behave, and humans are wicked in comparison to God, how much more will God, who is perfect in righteousness, answer those who bring their pleas before him.

B. Verse 13a—“know how to give good gifts to your children”

1. Also continues the point of v. 11-12.
 - a. Even wicked human fathers give good things to their children. Why wouldn’t God do likewise for his children?

C. God is our “Father in heaven”

1. Recaps what was laid out in v. 2. God is our Father in heaven and has adopted us as his children.
2. He will give us good things just as earthly parents give their children good things.

D. But God does not want to give us just any good gift . . . v. 13b

1. God has a specific gift in mind: the gift of the Holy Spirit
 - a. This is a dramatic change from the parallel verse in Matt. 7:11, which only promises that God will give his children “good gifts.”
 - b. Throughout the Lucan corpus, Luke repeatedly refers to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as a “gift”: Acts 2:38; 8:20; 10:45; 11:17. Also the “promise of the Father” (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; cf. 2:33). This passage seems to prepare Luke's readers for that motif. (TCL: 191)
 - c. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit that rejuvenates us from the effects of sin and gives us power is a “gift” that our Father in Heaven wants all believers to have.

E. “Your Father in Heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him,” v. 13b

1. The gift of the Holy Spirit will come after prayer (Acts 1:14; 4:23-31; 8:14-17; 9:11, 17). Believers should ask God for it.
2. Tannehill: “In Rom 8:15-16 and Gal 4:6 the Spirit is cited as witness that the believers are God's children, who can address God as Abba, Father. In both Luke-Acts and Paul's letters, the experience of a new, closer relation to God through the Spirit lies behind this connection between the Spirit and God as Father.” (TCL: 191)

Conclusion—God does not merely wish to give us what we want. He wants to give us what *we need*.

1. Prayer is an important part of our relationship with the Father as his sons and daughters through adoption.
2. The Lord's Prayer is the call sign of disciples of Jesus Christ.
3. Jesus urged us to be bold, even shamelessly audacious, in making our requests before

God.

4. God will answer our prayers, but he will give us our “daily bread”—what we need to subsist on, not anything and everything we may want or think that we need.
5. What God really wants to give us is his Holy Spirit, to dwell in us, pray with us, guide us, direct us, and empower us to make his kingdom come.

Challenge—Is the Holy Spirit a regular presence in your life? Do you regularly feel Him guiding you and leading you in what to pray in? If not, will you pray and ask God to give you the gift of His Spirit, to let the Third Person of the Trinity dwell in you and sanctify you?

Illustration: I love to give my daughter good gifts. How much more is God waiting to give us his Holy Spirit when we ask for it in prayer.

Abbreviations

- ACL Arthur A. Just, Jr. and Thomas C. Oden, eds., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Luke* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003).
- HST Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York, N. Y.: Scribner, Armstrong and Co., 1873).
- GCL Justo L. González, *Luke* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).
- LHT I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian & Theologian* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988).
- TCL Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville, Tn.: Abingdon Press, 1996).

Appendix A: Harley at Christmas

Here is a sample of how I would share this anecdote:

Last Christmas was a very special one for my daughter, Harley. Harley was three years old at the time, and technically this was going to be her fourth Christmas celebration. However, it was the first one where she was really old enough to appreciate what was coming and anticipate the holiday. All throughout the month of December, whenever we would pass by a toy store, she would ask for toys, and since she was going through her Thomas the Tank Engine train phase at the time, what she really wanted was lots and lots of Thomas the Tank Engine trains.

Harley was bold in asking for her trains. She made her requests whenever she saw something Thomas related. She never took “no” for an answer.

On Christmas morning, she woke up and began to open presents, and sure enough, the first one was a Thomas the Tank Engine train. She grabbed another present and she ran over to me, and she asked, “Is it another train?” As if she was afraid that it would be something else.

I just looked at her, and I smiled, and I said, “Of course it's another train! Hurry up and open it!” She had so much anticipation and joy in her eyes.

I am Harley's mother, and I love to give her good gifts.



Appendix B: The White Tights

Here is a sample of how I would share this anecdote:

When I was three or four years old, I was getting dressed for preschool one day when suddenly, an idea hit me. I had put on my tights, and I had put on my t-shirt, and I realized that my tights felt exactly like pants. They were snug and they were warm enough. So, I decided that I did not want to wear a skirt today. I wanted to wear just tights and a t-shirt.

My mother said “no.” She tried to explain to me that tights are see-through and it isn't proper to show off one's Rainbow Brite underoos, but I did not understand the concept of “propriety,” and there was nothing my mother could have said to me at the time that I would have understood. The tights and underwear were covering up everything that pants would cover up, so I could not understand why this was forbidden.

I cried. I screamed. I thrashed and threw a fit. But my mother was firm: “You are not going to school in just your tights and that's final.” In my mind, my mother was being arbitrary and cruel. In reality, I was asking for a snake or a scorpion, and my mother was refusing to give it to me. My mother had an adult's perspective, and I had a child's perspective. Likewise, God has an eternal perspective, and sometimes we only have a human one.