LUKE 11

Luke 11:1-4. The Lord's Prayer

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 554-555.

The Savior's teaching about prayer (Luke 11:1–4), closely mirroring His words about prayer in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:9–13), sits snugly in a context framed first by Martha's petition to Jesus and then by His further teachings about seeking earnestly, all pointing to prayer (Luke 10:40; 11:5–13). The tenor of the whole episode raises prayer to an experience that rests on a warm relationship with the Father rather than dealing with a distant God who stands aloof and must be coaxed by an endless series of gifts. In a word, the Father holds Himself accessible to a petitioner. He will respond to any and all just as He does to His Son. Remarkably, the passage hints that the Baptist has taught his disciples similarly and shows that he is already dead.

Jesus's model for prayer deals with two aspects of a person's life: the spiritual and the temporal. To open the first, a person acknowledges that God is the Father and that He inhabits a heavenly place. For, in the heart of Jesus's language, one perceives that God resides in a celestial locale. He is not everywhere in some loose spatial sense.

In harmony with this perception, borne of an acknowledgment that the Father indeed is "in heaven," the worshipper essentially petitions that the celestial order not only come to this world in the distant future but also that it, in the here and now, become a part of our lives. That is, in harmony with the purposes of this order, we pray that God's kingdom will indeed come to us, as the following words detail. For by arriving and influencing us, with gifts and blessings to bestow, God's kingdom grows as a feature relevant

in our lives, challenging us as devotees to measure ourselves against divine standards that bring us within the embrace of a heaven-led life.

This spiritual aspect finds companionship in the temporal since human realities force us to deal with "our daily bread," "our sins," and "temptation." From earliest times, God shows interest in touching individuals' earthly lives by offering instructions that touch on food and wealth and sacrifices that celebrate God's gifts of such items. For example, He directs Adam to earn his food by "the sweat of [his] face," which he does, even teaching his children to follow suit.¹ Then the Lord commands Adam and Eve to offer sacrifice on the increase of their flocks, which they and their children do (Genesis 4:3–4; Moses 5:5, 19–20). In later eras, God involves Himself in giving instructions about what foods a person should and should not eat.² Such occurrences highlight an underlying heavenly concern for temporal matters among humans.

Questions have arisen among scholars about the originality of the Lord's prayer in the context where Luke places it, especially because it largely duplicates Jesus's words on prayer in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:9–13) and because it shows evidence of later copyists' tampering. The questions reduce themselves to whether or not Jesus serves up the same teaching twice or whether Matthew and Luke simply draw from a common source and, after making their own adjustments, insert Jesus's prayer into different contexts. In response, nothing requires that Jesus speak the same or similar words on one occasion only. To limit Him in this artificial way goes against shared experiences among noted teachers, including those in antiquity, who frequently repeat themselves. Further, the settings sketched by Matthew and Luke differ so remarkably from one another that they argue for different occasions yet similar instruction.

Luke 11:5-10. The Pleading Friend at Midnight

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 559–560.

Lost in this memorable story is the Savior's more than subtle emphasis on the home (Luke 11:5–10). The main characters are fathers, and the action affects their homes and families—the one family receives a late-arriving guest and the other is awakened by a noisy request for bread. Both fathers model for their children what they should do, as in the next illustration (Luke 11:11–13)—in one instance, becoming the generous, welcoming host; in the other, getting out of bed and helping a friend, even if grumbling.

On another level, persistence forms the motto of this story. In this brief account, Jesus captures the essence of prayer: its success requires consistent and sustained effort. The importuning man succeeds not because of the goodwill of his friend who is already in bed—and there is plenty of goodwill—but because he persists in knocking and imploring at the friend's door. In the end, his friend cannot deny him. To be sure, the request is modest: only three loaves of bread. But the reason for the request, the arrival of an unexpected guest, demands the host's immediate and, if needed, sustained action. The hour of the

day, midnight in this case, does not ultimately count for much but cleverly adds to the drama of the story. Even so, at the edge of Jesus's notation about the time of day rests the reassurance that God is available at any time and in any circumstance.

The point about persistence in prayer does not stand in cool isolation in Luke's Gospel but will receive strong reinforcement when, later in Jesus's ministry, He will repeat the same message in another story: that of the widow who persists in requesting that a judge settle a dispute. She bothers him with her constant pleading, effectively forcing him to act on her case so that he will be rid of her (Luke 18:1–6). Her tireless effort, that of "continual coming" to the judge (18:5), underscores the virtue of dogged persistence in prayer.

Luke 11:11-13. Prayer

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 561–562.

As before, the Savior brings us inside a home, in this case to witness interactions between a father and son that rest on generosity (Luke 11:11–13). In doing so, He lays emphasis on the family and home as the irreplaceable locale for meaningful relationships. To be sure, He is merely illustrating a point about Heavenly Father answering prayers, but His choice of illustration is compelling. He does not draw attention to the world of commerce; He does not appeal to the religious establishment. He turns to the home.

At the top of His list, Jesus compellingly illustrates that God will give both more generously and more regularly than humans do. He frames this divine gift-giving within the larger picture of prayer: if we will only ask and knock. To achieve His end, He speaks in hyperbole, or exaggerated terms. It is silliness, of course, to think that a loving parent might give evil, hurtful gifts to a child. Because of the way that Jesus presents His ideas, centering them on parents and children, these ideas will remain immovable in the memory of those who hear and of those who learn of these words from the hearers. To help hearers grasp His point, He directs their thoughts to common foodstuffs as the good gifts (fish, egg) and, as evil gifts, to creatures that do not and cannot serve as food for them (serpent, scorpion).

Because Jesus sets out a similar list of contrasts in His Sermon on the Mount, one comes back to the question of whether Matthew and Luke are simply drawing from a common source and inserting Jesus's words into a place of their own choosing. In response, we notice that the manuscripts of Luke 11:11 show evidence of copyists adding the words from Matthew 7:9 about the bread and stone. Hence, it appears that originally the form of the saying was not identical in the two Gospels. This possibility should give pause to those who claim a common origin.

Luke 11:14–28. The Devil in Homes and Households

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 573-575.

Inaugurated by persons who claim that Jesus casts out devils by Beelzebub, the whole thrust of these verses pushes forward the Savior's power over the unseen world of demons, including the devil's dominance over captive spirits (Luke 11:14–28). But that aspect is not the only bright, visible thread. Intriguingly bound up with this demon-defeating power is the dimension of home and households. Somehow, lying amid the banter of Jesus with His opponents and rising within His sayings to them, home and family stand in close proximity to the world of evil. They are so close that this sinister world both forms an inimical and crippling intrusion into the home and, in Jesus's words, must be overcome and separated from it. In effect, without a conquering effort, evil can make its permanent camp within a person's home (see Alma 40:13). Moreover, the stories and sayings packed into these verses illumine Jesus's interest in home and family, underscoring their proper place as refuges from evil.³

In the conflict, Jesus pushes back the frontiers of the devil's kingdom (see the introduction to chapter 4). Even when Jesus's teaching is seen through a metaphorical lens, it becomes clear that He is tossing out the intruder, "the strong man" who has invaded His house and "his kingdom" and has taken captives who now need deliverance. If we understand that Jesus often speaks on both a terrestrial and celestial level at the same time, we find here a strong allusion to His redeeming work among departed spirits. Satan is the one who earlier seeks to represent himself as the holy one who dwells on high, in a holy place, effectively in a holy house. Thus, the house becomes the focus, the battleground as it were, between the forces of good and evil. The story of the wandering spirit illustrates the point most graphically: this creature pines for its lost home and, when opportunity arises, pushes its way back inside with the help of allies, thus disrupting the home's sacred and tranquil character (Luke 11:24–26).

The interests in the home and family, as Luke presents them, arise initially in the story of the sisters Martha and Mary, who host Jesus in Martha's house (Luke 10:38–42). There, a division arises, an aspect that persists into Jesus's discussion about casting out demons. Hence, these stories are to be seen as a whole, fitting tightly together and illustrating Jesus's concern for a harmony in the home that rests on proper spiritual principles, as Jesus's words about Mary demonstrate: "One thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part" (10:42). Further, Jesus's concept of a strong home environment includes the tangible, concrete influence of the "stronger" person—that is, the Savior Himself—within one's "palace" (11:21–22). A person's commitment to bring Jesus's influence into the home cannot be half-baked, for the stakes are high: "He that is not with me is against me" (11:23). Additionally, a home comfortably "swept and garnished" fails as a refuge from harmful influences if nothing is put in place to resist wickedness or to take the place of earlier enticing evil (11:24–26). But this is not all. One's birth into a good home, where parents exert an uplifting influence, does not ensure a good outcome by itself. More is required. As Jesus

reminds His hearers, "blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it" (11:28). This saying and another like it (see 8:21), both tied to Jesus's mother, point to her as the first, enduring example in His life of one who keeps a proper home adorned with values and obedience to God.

In framing His teachings on home and evil influences—in Jesus's society, possession by demons is a firm proof of evil's presence—Jesus brings forward vivid, even extreme language, evidently to make His points more memorable: a kingdom in revolt and a house collapsing against another structure (Luke 11:17); sons of His hearers as the hearers' judges (11:19); God's finger and, with it, the palpable presence of his kingdom (11:20); the conquest of a palace and the freeing of captives (11:22); and a wandering, "unclean spirit" who resists banishment (11:24–26). Both the original hearers and later readers come away with an enhanced memory of Jesus's teachings and the incidents that spawn them.

Besides the colorful character of these verses, here a person learns more about the world of Satan and his minions than in any other New Testament passage. First, Satan is real and possesses a kingdom. Within that kingdom, he is "the chief of the devils" who are his subjects. Second, those demons can be controlled by divine means, for Jesus and others are known exorcists who cast out such creatures from their human hosts (Luke 11:19). Third, Satan highly values exercising control over homes and households and can be best resisted and wrestled down with the aid of the "stronger" one—that is, the Savior Himself. Fourth, he and his minions do not give up easily, as the story of the "unclean spirit" and his seven allies proves. Their resourceful persistence reminds a reader of Moses's four attempts to drive off a determined Satan before he finally departs and of the Lord's warning words in two other places: "That wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth," and, "The adversary spreadeth his dominions." 5

Significantly, Jesus's summarizing words throughout these verses illumine much of what He is trying to highlight. One of His framing concepts enfolds the kingdom of God: if He is truly casting out demons "with the finger of God" (that is, with God's authority and power) then "the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Luke 11:20). No one need wait; Jesus's power over demons demonstrates that it has arrived. Therefore—and here is the second summarizing point—whether or not a person's actions are in harmony with Jesus's actions becomes a major issue: "He that is not with me is against me." There is more. Jesus's actions are those of gathering. A disciple is to follow Jesus's example and not act contrarily: "He that gathereth not with me scattereth" (11:23). Such actions, turned in a positive direction—that is, standing with Jesus as a disciple and gathering with Him—will be a natural outcome of the third summarizing statement, framed in the form of a beatitude: "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it" (11:28). The risk for many of His hearers in this setting, particularly those who question His motives when He casts out devils, is that they will not perceive that "the kingdom of God is come," that they are thus scattering rather than gathering, and that they unwittingly are unable to "hear the word of God, and keep it."

Luke 11:29–32. Signs of the Times

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 578–580.

When the Savior addresses the timeless topic of repentance, He fills His sayings with stories that feature Gentiles, thus underscoring the universal need to repent (Luke 11:29–32). No one escapes. The actions of the "queen of the south" in traveling far to meet Solomon (Luke 11:31) illustrate the essential element of resolute resolve in the repentance process—literally nothing should deter a person from repenting before God. As a further illustration, the ready response of the citizens of Nineveh shimmers in the desert heat as a beckoning brook: "The people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them." Their response to Jonah's warning was so firm and decisive that "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not" (Jonah 3:5, 10).

The need for repentance is more than universal. It stands forth as the key ingredient in Jesus's ministry, for He is its visible "sign" (Luke 11:30). His palpable presence, as Jonah walking among the Ninevites, presses hearers to come to repentance; His royal presence, as that of the queen in King Solomon's court, reminds His audience that none, "from the greatest of them even to the least," are exempt from repenting (Jonah 3:5). By calling up Solomon and Jonah, Jesus underlines in bright hues His kingly and prophetic authority to demand repentance.

Moreover, He features Gentiles as recipients of God's mercies, a tactic that He follows from the day that He enters the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:24–27). Gentiles are as deserving as Israelites of God's blessings. To anchor His point in His own actions, Jesus visits the gentile demoniac, heals him, and sends the Seventy among foreigners (8:26–39; 10:1–20). Such accounts, of course, prepare us for the coming mission to the Gentiles, which Luke will narrate in the book of Acts. But these reports represent more. They bring fulfillment to Simeon's words that the infant Jesus will bring the salvation that God has "prepared before the face of all the people" and will stand as a "light to lighten the Gentiles" (2:31–32). He is that light, He is the one prepared.

One major theme of these verses concerns judgment, which shapes a waxing warning to Jesus's hearers. This theme arises again in the final scenes of this chapter wherein He renders judgment against some Pharisees and lawyers who will join Him as guests at a dinner (Luke 11:37–54). Much in these accounts ties back to Jesus's hopeful—or ominous—statement, "The kingdom of God is come upon you" (11:20). Earlier, Jesus stands forth as judge when healing the man with the withered hand (6:6–10), and His words about judgment here illumine His authority to speak about it. Notably, the response both among the Pharisees and lawyers, and at the Galilean synagogue where He meets the man, is almost identical. It is one of fury (6:11; 11:53–54).

The expressions "a greater than Solomon is here" and "a greater than Jonas is here" connect back to a theme grounded amid His words about "a strong man" and "a stronger than he" (11:31–32, 21–22). The language of comparison, which Jesus adopts through these sayings, thrusts Him forward as the stronger man, the greater king, the clearer prophetic voice. We sense no outsized ego in His language. He is simply framing in clear terms what He is.

Luke 11:33-36. Light and Darkness

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 583–585.

The Savior's interest in candlesticks and candles—properly "lamp stands" and "lamps"—first brings a reader within the temple and thus within sacred space (Luke 11:33–36). The term translated "candlestick" (Greek *lychnia*) points foremost to the golden lamp stand within the sanctuary, with its seven lamps. To be sure, on Jesus's lips, verse 33 bears all the marks of a home. And the presence of lamp stands in homes or apartments receives confirmation from the Old Testament (LXX 4 Kings 4:10). But the connections to a sacred place are not to be missed, effectively linking temple and home together as places of holiness.

Lamps, of course, bear symbolic meaning throughout Jesus's teachings. We think of the woman who lights a lamp to illumine the corners of her home as she searches for her lost coin (Luke 15:8); we consider Jesus's admonition to be ready: "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights [lamps] burning" (12:35); we recall His words about the Baptist being "a burning and a shining light [lamp]" (John 5:35). All such sayings point to lamps as metaphors for radiant light.

In this connection, the lamp and the light may well refer to Jesus, now lit and visible (see Doctrine and Covenants 14:9). As we learn elsewhere, His light illumines and glows in all of creation: "The light of Christ... is in the sun... [and] giveth you light... [and] giveth life to all things" (Doctrine and Covenants 88:7, 11, 13). Naturally, His audience will not know this characteristic, but He is trying to coax them into glimpsing even a little of the light that emanates from Him. In the language of the Psalmist, "thou wilt light my candle [lamp]: the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness" (Psalm 18:28). More than this, Jesus's appeal to images of light and darkness embraces the contrasts in accepting or rejecting His message. If a person receives His message fully, then "thy whole body therefore [will] be full of light." If not, then "thy body also is full of darkness" (Luke 11:34).

Verse 36 poses problems for interpreters who wrestle with understanding "the whole shall be full of light." For some, the light comes from those who are illumined by Jesus; for others, the light emanates from those who do not know Jesus but who are upright in their lives; for still others, the light infuses and remains within those who accept Jesus and His message. Notably, the Joseph Smith Translation adds eight words to the verse and thereby offers a clarifying tie to the home: "The whole shall be full of light,

as when the bright shining of a candle *lighteneth a room and* doth give the light *in all the room*" (Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 11:37). By adding these words, the Joseph Smith Translation astutely lifts emphasis from a person's inner light and sets it upon light that illuminates a home. Remarkably, such a notion links back to Jesus's interest in the home that has been taken over by "a strong man" and then is freed by "a stronger," allusions to the devil and to Himself.⁷ In the earlier passage, the home is shown to be an important battleground between forces of evil and good. The changes in this later verse continue the same sense—accepting that Jesus's light means that the entire home, including its inhabitants, "shall be full of light." Otherwise, the risk looms that all within the home will be doused in darkness.

The question now arises, What is the connection between these sayings about light and Jesus's prior discussion on judgment? (Luke 11:29–36). First, on one level it seems that whether a person is enlightened or darkened forms a judgment of sorts about the person's character. Second, on another level the person who prays and maintains unity in the home and honors Jesus receives light, so that the "whole body also is full of light" (11:1–32, 34). Not surprisingly, in the story that follows, that of Jesus in the home of a Pharisee, Jesus's condemnation of certain actions forms strong judgments, tying to 11:29–32.

Luke 11:37-54. Confronting Pharisees and Lawyers about the Law

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 597–600.

All three Synoptic Gospels record a story that focuses on not washing before a meal. In the reports of Matthew and Mark, the question concerns the criticized behavior of the Savior's disciples (Matthew 15:1–9; Mark 7:1–9). In contrast, Luke's story deals only with Jesus, not His disciples (Luke 11:37–54). As in the story of Martha and Mary (10:38), Jesus comes without His disciples as a guest into the home of the Pharisee who invites him to the meal. As in another Pharisaic home, other guests come for the event (7:36–50). One suspects that because Jesus is traveling away from Galilee, the guests are not personally acquainted with Him but are curious about this teacher from Nazareth whose reputation doubtless precedes Him.

The scene in the Pharisee's home becomes a key moment in Jesus's ministry. The opposition that has been dogging His steps during recent months, after breaking out in Galilee (Luke 6:11), seems to have grown rather quiet. But it receives a major boost from the shouting match that erupts in the Pharisee's home. Instead of seeing the event as a spirited difference of opinion, those whom Jesus criticizes—He is being forceful in his criticisms, seizing the high ground—thereafter seek "to provoke him" and "to catch something out of his mouth" (11:53–54). In a word, Jesus's opponents take new life from the heated exchange.

At issue is public style versus inner character. At the meal Jesus reclines, surrounded by people who carry important influence in their society: Pharisees, who as Josephus reminds readers, bear more

influence within the populace than any other contemporary group, and scribes, who are the legal experts and set the tone and parameters of how to obey God's laws that He has revealed to Moses and the other prophets. But their influence reeks of self-interest and pride: "Ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup... but your inward part is full of ravening... lawyers [scribes]... have taken away the key of knowledge... and them that were entering in ye hindered" (Luke 11:39, 52). Does the heated exchange lead any in the gathering to see Jesus as Messiah? Likely not. But the scene brings to fulfillment the promise inherent in the notice that when "the word of God" comes to earth, it does not come to any of the notable and influential persons, who are laden with corruption, but to "John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness" (3:1–2).

Luke erects the whole passage on the framework of six woes, three uttered by Jesus against the Pharisees and three against the lawyers or scribes. The first of His dark sayings falls generally on Pharisees, without marking any individual, because of tedious attention to tiny, outward efforts—"ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs" but "pass over" what is important in the law, such as "judgment and the love of God" (Luke 11:42). Their self-importance, brimming over in the expectation that others will honor them, brings down the second woe on them because of their "love [for] the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets" (11:43). The third breaks thunderously over their heads in the epithet "hypocrites!" and the ringing accusation that "ye are as graves" (11:44). When the scribes, allies of Pharisees, protest that Jesus is reproaching them too, He does not miss a beat, turning to them and scorching their behavior—"ye lade men with burdens . . . and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers" (11:46). His second woe crashes down on their inner disdain for prophets past as well as on their pretended eagerness to "build their sepulchres" as memorials of honor (11:47–48). His third and last woe drives hard against their failed stewardship over "the key of knowledge," which they turn in God's lock neither for themselves nor for others (see 11:52).

We suspect that Jesus purposely omits washing His hands or immersing Himself in the company of the other guests, knowing full well how they will receive His disregard for a commonly revered practice. He seems anxious to make His point to these influential guests that external, public actions disclose little of a person's state of being, even though the guests view handwashing as possessing deep religious significance. Rather, He quickly leads their minds to ultimate values in contrast to societal flash: inner cleanness ("ye are as graves") and love of God and proper discharge of responsibilities ("them that were entering in ye hindered"). His words and actions point to His schooled observations about human nature: often, as soon as a person acquires "a little authority," that person "will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion" (Doctrine and Covenants 121:39).

One further coloration requires comment. On September 1, 1842, an editorial ran in the *Times and Seasons* that pointed to this passage and, in light of the apocryphal *Protevangelium of James 23–24*, claimed that the martyred Zacharias was the Baptist's father rather than the Old Testament prophet of the same name—a clear impossibility (Luke 11:51; 2 Chronicles 24:20–22). The issue has to do with whether Joseph

Smith penned that editorial. In fact, there are problems with attributing the editorial to Joseph Smith, as this newspaper piece would potentially put Joseph Smith's prophetic stamp on the notion that the Zacharias noted in Luke 11:51 was John's father. Richard L. Anderson has gathered information that proves the editorial is not that of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Because of Anderson's careful efforts, we can make four strong circumstantial observations: (1) The editorial is unsigned. Typically, Joseph Smith signed his letters and editorials, as in the cases of Doctrine and Covenants 127 and 128, which the Prophet drew up in the early days of September 1842. (2) The editorial is written in the third person, not the first person; the latter was the preferred style of Joseph Smith. Again, Doctrine and Covenants 127 and 128 serve as comparisons. (3) During August 1842, Joseph Smith was in hiding, moving from home to home among members of the Church to avoid arrest. Although evidence exists that he hid in Nauvoo as well as in nearby communities during the month of August, he would have enjoyed little opportunity to pen a long editorial. (4) The writing style of the *Times and Seasons* editorial matches that of W. W. Phelps most closely, not the Prophet Joseph. Consequently, the overwhelming heft of the evidence leads to the conclusion that Joseph Smith did not write the editorial in question and therefore we look to the Old Testament as the referent in Jesus's words.

Notes

- 1 Genesis 3:19; Moses 4:25; 5:1, 3.
- 2 See Leviticus 11; Doctrine and Covenants 89; also Daniel 1:3–16.
- 3 See the comments on Luke 6:20–49; 14:26; 18:20; 20:17–19.
- 4 See the comments on 4:18; 5:4; 11:21, 22; see also Doctrine and Covenants 138:11–24.
- 5 Doctrine and Covenants 82:5; 93:39; Moses 1:16, 18, 20, 21.
- 6 LXX Exodus 25:31; 40:4; 2 Chronicles 4:7, 20; Jeremiah 52:19; and so forth.
- 7 See the comments on Luke 11:14–28.
- 8 2 Chronicles 24:20–22; see the note on Luke 11:51.

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