

Articles and Sermons :: Royal Beggers by David Ravenhill

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Royal Beggers

A REALIZATION

In 1987, I went to India for the first time to teach for a week in a Bible school just outside the city of Hyderabad. It was my first real visit to India, apart from a brief touchdown once at the Bombay airport. Touring the crowded city, I found myself both overwhelmed and fascinated by the activity around me. Every available means of transport had been pressed into service. Pull carts, push carts, horse-drawn carts, bicycles, scooters, trucks, busses – just about every conceivable form of transport filled the streets. Traffic had a mind of its own, weaving – even writhing – as it crawled along imaginary lanes. Vehicles seemed piled up to heaven!

While waiting at a traffic signal, I heard a voice. I turned, assuming it to be that of my driver. It was not. I looked down and located the source of the sound right beside me. Sitting precariously on a little strip that divided the lanes of traffic was a small boy, about eight to twelve years old. His exact age was difficult to determine, due to his pitiful physical condition. His young body was twisted, his arms deformed, his legs all knotted up beneath him – and he was begging.

I remember looking at that little boy and realizing, maybe for the first time in my life, exactly what Jesus meant when He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). That word "poor" is an interesting term in the original Greek text. It literally means beggars. What Jesus was really saying was, "Blessed are the beggars, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

BLESSED ARE THE BEGGARS

When Jesus first drew this analogy for His disciples, as recorded in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5), His goal was to impart to His twelve future apostles an understanding of the kingdom. This principle of dependency was His first point, and the key to all other kingdom principles: God's Kingdom belongs to spiritual beggars.

On another occasion, yet in a similar vein, Jesus told His disciples, "The Son can do nothing of Himself" (John 5:19). What an amazing statement! Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Word that became flesh, said, "I can do absolutely nothing of myself."

He then went on to say, "I can do nothing of my own initiative" (John 5:30). In other words, He emphasized, "I don't initiate a single thing." He was totally dependent upon His Father. He was basically telling them, "Whatever I hear the Father say, that's what I say. Whatever I see the Father doing, that's what I do. I don't do anything of my own free will. I don't create anything of my own. I listen. I'm totally dependent upon the Father."

In the same way that Jesus was dependent on the Father, He went on to explain, His disciples would be dependent on Him. "I am the Vine," He told them, "and you are the branches – Apart from Me, you can do nothing" (John 5:15).

I believe one of the major keys to longevity and continued blessing in the Christian life is to remain in the place of absolute and total dependency upon God. We must be absolutely convinced of the fact that "nothing good lives in me" (Romans 7:18). I do not have the ability, apart from the grace of God, to accomplish anything for the Kingdom of God. I am totally and completely dependent upon Him for everything.

That is the very first law and principle that Jesus gave concerning the kingdom of God. If we are to be a part of God's kingdom, principle number one is, "Blessed are the beggars." We must embrace the understanding that we have absolutely no ability in and of ourselves, and therefore see ourselves as beggars. I am not ashamed to say that I am a spiritual beggar. Hardly a day goes by that I don't get down on my face before God and lift up my tin cup, so to speak, and say, "God, give me of your wealth; give me of your sustenance."

Notice the continuation of the verse, which states, "Blessed are the beggars, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Not will I be. In other words, available to the beggar are all heaven's resources. What a beautiful statement!

For example, the Bible says if you lack wisdom, ask of God (James 1:5). God is a God who wants to provide in every area of need. We need simply acknowledge our lack and ask.

Even the apostle Paul asked, "Who is equal to such a task?" (2 Corinthians 2:16). Imagine Paul saying that! His spiritual pedigree was a mile long (Philippians 3:4-6). He received his training under one of the greatest teachers of his day, and was himself one of the most brilliant theological minds ever known. Yet Paul said, "I am not capable. I am not sufficient to effectively minister the gospel of Jesus Christ. My sufficiency is in God Himself." (2 Corinthians 3:5, paraphrased) If that's true of Paul, how much more is it true of us today? And so God seeks to bring us to this place of dependency on Himself.

OUR FRIEND WHO ART IN HEAVEN

In Luke 11:1 the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. My father used to say that this was the only time anywhere in the New Testament where the disciples asked to be taught anything. There is no record of them saying, "Teach us how to preach." There is no record of them saying, "Teach us how to teach." There is no record of them saying, "Teach us how to walk on water," or "Teach us how to cast out demons."

One day, though, they did have a little bit of a problem. According to Mark 9, they came to Jesus and said, "Yesterday, Lord, we had no trouble. The demons were just sort of popping out left, right, and center. But today they seem pretty stubborn."

Jesus simply replied, "Well, skip lunch and try again." That's my translation. In Scripture it reads, "This kind can only come out by prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:29). But this is the only time the disciples asked, "Teach us how to do something."

Foundational to their request was their timing: they made their request right after Jesus had finished praying (Luke 11:1). My father's observance, and I think rightly so, was that they took notice that the key to the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ lay in His relationship with the Father. They saw that everything Jesus did was tied directly to the throne of God. They saw Him tapping in, so to speak, to the resources of heaven in prayer, making personal contact with God. The disciples were saying, in essence, "If you can teach us how to touch the throne of God, we can do what you do. So teach us how to pray."

Then, of course, Jesus gave them what we call the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:2-4). This is a shortened version in Luke's account. But in Luke's account there is something not included in Matthew's account. Jesus went right on to tell them a story.

"Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him'" (Luke 11:5-6).

Obviously, this friend had arrived late at night, because the man went to his other friend at midnight. He'd been expecting this visitor, but had failed to make preparation. Maybe he hadn't expected the friend to get there until morning. Perhaps the host thought he would have time to get up in the morning and go down to the local bakery for bread. Unfortunately, the friend arrived early. The poor host was caught short and embarrassed because, in this culture, providing hospitality was very important. We can imagine the host's humiliation. He had absolutely nothing to offer.

But then the man remembered another friend. This friend always had an ample supply. He always had an abundance. So even though it was midnight, he went to his friend's house and began pounding on the door.

I can just imagine his neighbor opening the window and saying, "Shhh, you're going to wake the baby! Don't you realize what time it is? The family is in bed. What's going on?" Irritated, the neighbor responded, "I'm not going to get up. Leave me alone" (vs. 7).

But the anxious host kept on pounding until, finally, his friend relented. Maybe it was because he knew he wasn't going to get any rest until he did so. Perhaps it was because he also recognized that his neighbor had no other resources. Either way, it was at this point in the story that Jesus said, "He will get up and give him as much as he needs" (vs. 8).

Keep in mind that Jesus was speaking about prayer, both for ourselves and for other people. We will always be surrounded

ded by friends, friends who have problems. They will come to us during the course of our life and ministry with every type of need: emotional needs, spiritual needs, physical needs, and marital needs. The sooner we recognize we have nothing to set before them, the better. This is the principle Jesus was teaching. "Of myself, by myself, I can do absolutely nothing. I cannot solve your problem, but I have a Friend who has the answer." Prayer is going to your greater Friend on behalf of your lesser friend, in order to meet his or her need. So we can confidently pray, "Our Friend who art in heaven...."

LEARNING TO BEG

Maybe you know a marriage that is on the verge of breaking up. The couple has come to you two or three times for counsel. You're at your wits' end; you don't know what to do next. You've tried, but you've exhausted all your own abilities and wisdom. So you get on your face before God and say, "God, I need an answer. This couple is coming again tonight. Father, I do not have any bread. I do not have the means to satisfy them. But you do, Lord. You know this couple. Give me wisdom, a word of knowledge, or some sort of insight. I'm begging you for some sort of ability whereby I can minister effectively to this couple."

That little street beggar in India knew full well that he didn't have the strength or mobility to do anything other than beg. He was reduced to surviving on someone else's generosity and goodness. In other words, his life was derived from someone else's means, someone else's wealth, someone else's graciousness. He was in a place of total dependency. If nobody helped him, he could not make it on his own. That's what it means to be a beggar.

The Bible says the Father will give us as much as we need. Be thankful we have a generous God! When we learn to beg, we will always have plenty. We will never, ever, ever drain His resources. He always has an ample supply of wisdom, insight, and understanding. His power and authority are always available to us. Whatever it is, whatever we need at any given time, God has it.

Let's end with some prayer ourselves – some spiritual begging, so to speak. Pray with me, "Father, I thank you that you delight in taking weak, empty vessels, so that you can pour your life into them. You pour your strength into them, your wisdom into them, your anointing into their lives. Help us to recognize, Lord, that we don't have any strength or ability apart from your grace. Lord, keep us in that place of dependency. Don't ever let us get to a place where we become independent. Father, destroy that independence that is within every single one of us, and keep us on our face before you. In Jesus' Name, Amen."