

Bite Size Bible Study

5

By Lee Logue

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

We all have prayed the “Lord’s Prayer”, and some may even have a copy hanging on one of the walls in our home.

I have always had a funny feeling with the line concerning debts and debtors. Some translations translate the original word as “done wrong” and others have used “sins”. Other translations seem to equate it to money, which is what I always thought as a child.

We in the western civilizations live in a money driven culture and generally see this part of the prayer as a monetary debt that we may owe someone or that they may owe us. But the first century peasants understood debt as a broken interpersonal relationship.

Their lives were based on these interpersonal relationships. Except in the cities, they lived in large family groups where almost everyone was related in some way, and a patriarch was responsible for the entire extended family. In this type of culture interpersonal relationships are of more value than any economic value. In these cultures haggling over the cost of something was expected but not so much for a better price but to solidify the friendship between the two. In this culture friends are faithful and the seller will set the price so that the buyer gets good value for the product. This system works well in a family oriented group.

However, during the time Jesus lived the system was breaking down. The variety of taxes and tolls imposed by the Roman government amounted to 30 to 40% of the agricultural production. Add to that the tithes and offerings to the Temple and there is little left for the seller and his family to live on; and getting the best price was a matter of survival, and many of the interpersonal relationships suffered.

In Genesis 18 we find Abraham haggling with God over the impending destruction of Sodom. Abraham and God were friends. They had a strong interpersonal relationship. Haggling was expected and respected.

Genesis 18:22-32

The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord. Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

The Lord said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

Watch as Abraham haggles with God on behalf of the people of Sodom. First he tries for 45 people, then 40 people, and so on down to the final only 10 people. Observe how both God and Abraham respect each other in this haggling for a better outcome.

Then Abraham spoke up again: “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?”

“If I find forty-five there,” he said, “I will not destroy it.”

Once again he spoke to him, “What if only forty are found there?” He said, “For the sake of forty, I will not do it.”

Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?”

He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

Abraham said, “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?”

He said, “For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.”

Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?”

He answered, “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.”

Seeing “debts and debtors” in the light of the Biblical culture give us new insight into how our interpersonal relationship with God can be beneficial for ourselves as well as our interceding with God for others.

Cornerstone Community Church

PO Box 654 Lemon Grove, CA 91945-0654 – www.cornerstonecommunityonline.org