

Lord's Prayer

Give Us Our Daily Bread

A 6-year-old was at a restaurant with his parents and his parents asked him to pray to bless the food, so he began, "God is good. God is great. Let us thank him for this food and we would even thank him more if mom bought me some ice cream after the meal. Liberty and justice for all. Amen!"

He prayed the prayer loudly enough that some folks at the restaurant began to chuckle except for one woman who said over the sounds of the snickering, "that's what's wrong with America today. Children don't even know how to pray. Praying for ice cream for heaven's sake!"

The little boy heard this woman's outrage and tears came to his eyes. And looking up to his father and said, "Daddy did I do something wrong?"

His father in an effort to comfort him said, "No son that was a nice prayer--- a very nice prayer!"

About that time an elderly gentleman came up to their table and said, "Son that was a great prayer! I happen to know for a fact that God was very pleased with your prayer!"

The little boy looked up at this kind elderly

gentleman and said, "Really?"

The man said, "Cross my heart." Then looking in the direction of the irritated woman, he said "ice cream is good for the soul. Maybe she could use a little ice cream."

Naturally, after the meal the boy's mom and dad ordered a sundae for their son. When the sundae was placed in front of him the boy thought for a moment, then he got up and took his sundae over to the woman who had complained. He set his treat in front of her and said, "Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes and my soul is good already. I think you need this more than me."

When we are praying for our daily bread, what does that encompass? Is ice cream a part of that? Or if we ask the question on a more global basis, we can say, since the prayer is not "give me this day, my daily bread," it's "give us this day our daily bread, what are we praying for the Church worldwide?"

Are there any Christians who need bread? Are there starving Christians around the world who, despite the fact that the Church of Jesus Christ prays this prayer, they still go to bed hungry at night? So when we say, "Give us this day our daily bread," what do we believe that that phrase really means?

This is the fifth message in our series on the Lord's Prayer. We've noted that this famous

A 6-year-old was at a restaurant with his parents and his parents asked him to pray to bless the food, so he began, "God is good. God is great. Let us thank him for this food and we would even thank him more if mom bought me some ice cream after the meal. Liberty and justice for all. Amen!"

He prayed the prayer loudly enough that some folks at the restaurant began to chuckle except for one woman who said over the sounds of the snickering, "that's what's wrong with America today. Children don't even know how to pray. Praying for ice cream for heaven's sake!"

The little boy heard this woman's outrage and tears came to his eyes. And looking up to his father and said, "Daddy did I do something wrong?"

His father in an effort to comfort him said, "No son that was a nice prayer--- a very nice prayer!"

About that time an elderly gentleman came up to their table and said, "Son that was a great prayer! I happen to know for a fact that God was very pleased with your prayer!"

The little boy looked up at this kind elderly gentleman and said, "Really?"

The man said, "Cross my heart." Then looking in the direction of the irritated woman, he said "ice cream is good for the soul. Maybe

The Problem We Need to Admit

she could use a little ice cream."

Naturally, after the meal the boy's mom and dad ordered a sundae for their son. When the sundae was placed in front of him the boy thought for a moment, then he got up and took his sundae over to the woman who had complained. He set his treat in front of her and said, "Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes and my soul is good already. I think you need this more than me."

When we are praying for our daily bread, what does that encompass? Is ice cream a part of that? Or if we ask the question on a more global basis, we can say, since the prayer is not "give me this day, my daily bread," it's "give

us this day our daily bread, what are we praying for the Church worldwide?

Are there any Christians who need bread? Are there hungry Christians around the world who, despite the fact that the Church of Jesus Christ prays this prayer, they still go to bed hungry at night? So when we say, "Give us this day our daily bread," what do we believe that that phrase really means?

This is the fifth message in our series on the Lord's Prayer. We've noted that this famous prayer is equally divided into two sections. Section one of the prayer includes the first three petitions where we pray to the Father about the Father. We pray about the person of the Father, "hallowed be thy name." then we pray about the plan of the Father, "Thy Kingdom come." Finally, we pray about the purpose of the Father, "Thy will be done." We are to pray these petitions before we ever get to the second half of the Lord's Prayer.

The second half of the Lord's Prayer is where we pray to the Father about the family.

the end of that chapter, after recording the Lord's Prayer for the second time, Jesus gives this illustration. He said, "your earthly father wouldn't give a snake to his son or daughter, would he? Or if your son or daughter asked for bread, he wouldn't give him a stone, would he? And then Jesus adds, how much more will your heavenly Father give to his children what they need?"

That passage explains why God has consistently provided parking places for my wife, but it doesn't resolve our problem. If anything, it intensifies the problem. Why would God provide parking places for my wife and refuse to answer the prayers of countless Christians who are asking for food?

So what do we do with that? If we're praying this prayer for the Church universal and we are believing in faith that God answers our prayer, how do we account for the fact that there are people who don't have bread?

Jim Bakker is a name known perhaps to many of you. He was the one who in many ways is the grandfather of the prosperity gospel theology that has been current in America for a number of years. He wrote a book entitled; *I Was Wrong*. In his book he writes, "For years I taught a theology that some skeptics called the prosperity gospel. I didn't mind a label. On the contrary, I was proud of it. You're absolutely right I said to the critics, I believe it, I preach it, I live it. I believe in a God who wants to bless his people. I even got to the point at PTL where I told people, don't pray, 'God if it be your will.' When you're praying for health and wealth, you know already that it's God's will for you to have those things. Instead of praying thy will be done. When you

want a new car, just claim it and tell God what kind of car you want. And be sure to specify the options and what color too. I may not have been so blatant about it, but I preach the prosperity gospel. The more I have studied the Bible, however, I've discovered that the prosperity gospel message does not line up with the tenor of Scripture. My heart was crushed to think that I had led so many people astray. I was appalled that I could be so wrong. I am grateful that God has not struck me dead as a false Prophet."

Many today believe that the evidence of God's blessing in their life is a new car or a new house or a good job. That is far from the truth of God's word. If that were the case, then gambling casino owners and drug kingpins and movie stars are among the most blessed by God. Jesus did not teach that riches are a sign of God's blessing. In fact, Jesus said, it's harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven than it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. If we equate earthly possessions and earthly friendships with God's favor, what do we tell the billions of those living in poverty? And what do we do if depression hits or if we lose a loved one?

That still doesn't solve our problem. "Give us this day our daily bread." What's the significance of that phrase? It seems to me we can only begin to answer our question when we move on to the second truth.

The Priority We Need to Keep

The second truth is the priority that we need to claim. I mentioned in an earlier message

that New Testament scholars are fairly universally agreed that the sections in Matthew that follow the statement of the Lord's Prayer are Jesus' commentary on the Lord's Prayer.

So verses 19 and following seem to be a commentary on the first three petitions where Jesus, in talking about the Kingdom and God's will and God's name, says, you can't serve two Masters because there should be only one master in your life.

So how does Jesus respond to the question we have raised? Jesus makes a priority statement that is to govern our thinking when it comes to the stuff of life. In Matthew 6:33, he says, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." It seems that Jesus is saying, in fact, if you focus on the Kingdom of God, you don't have to worry about bread. And by converse, if you are thinking about bread, you're going to be worrying a lot, because there's always that possibility there might be a day where you don't have bread. There will be a day when your car won't start or a day when you

might lose your job or lose your house. If you're focused on bread and the stuff of life, be prepared to worry and worry a lot. But if you're focused on the priority of God, seek Ye first, the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, well, then you can claim the promise. You don't have to worry about the stuff because God will take care of the stuff.

So we have to ask ourselves, how much do I really believe this priority? Before you answer, please note the disciples struggled with it.

You say, "Where do you get that?" In Matthew 6:28, right before the priority statement, we see that Jesus Christ says this, "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow? They don't labor or pain. Yet I tell you that even Solomon, in all his splendor was not dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothed the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow's thrown on the fire, will he not much more clothe you oh you of little faith."

This phrase you of little faith translates one Greek word. This is a Greek word that

is not frequent in the New Testament. It appears five times in the Gospel of Matthew and once in the Gospel of Luke. As Jesus uses this phrase, invariably, he's talking about his own disciples, telling them, "oh, you, of little faith."

For example, in Matthew 8:26 we learn the disciples of Jesus are in a boat in the Sea of Galilee, and a storm comes up. The disciples are filled with fear. Jesus is sleeping in the boat. You say, what a picture, at least a picture of Jesus so secure in his Father's purpose, in his Father's plan, He can sleep in the midst of a storm. The storm is still there, but Jesus is sleeping in the midst of the storm. Then we see, in verse 25, the disciples woke him, saying, "Lord, save us, we're going to drown. And he replied, you of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

The next time we see Jesus rebuking his disciples for their little faith is Matthew 14. In chapter 14, again they're on the water. Jesus is walking on the water. And Peter begins to walk on the water. But

Peter takes his eyes off Jesus and he begins to sink. And once again Jesus tells him, don't be afraid, and encourages Peter to look to him. Then according to v. 32, he rebukes Peter, "oh, you of little faith, why did you doubt." Finally, in Matthew 16:8 Jesus again is with the disciples of Jesus Christ. They cross the lake, but the disciples forgot to take bread. Be careful, Jesus said, be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The disciples discuss this saying among themselves. Is it because we didn't bring any bread? Then Jesus declared, "Ye, of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves, about having no bread? Don't you understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the 5000 and how many baskets you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the 4000 and how many baskets you gathered? How is it that you don't understand? I wasn't talking to you about bread."

I was talking about Kingdom priorities! But you're still stuck thinking about bread. Don't you see? If your focus and your interest is on bread, you're going to miss the Kingdom truth. You're going to miss the Kingdom priority. In the parallel account in the Gospel of Mark, Mark records that Jesus was even stronger in what he said. He condemns them saying, "O you who have hardened your hearts against God."

These are the disciples of Jesus Christ, those who are close to him, who despite the fact that they lived with Jesus, got so caught up in bread, they failed to see the significance of the Kingdom. So, they found themselves regularly worried and afraid.

Some years ago we spent a week with our son's family in outer Mongolia about 6 miles

from the Siberia border. The week that we were there we awoke each day to temperatures around 40 degrees below zero. Our son's only means of heating his little cabin was wood. So every day my son spent about an hour chopping wood to get his day's supply. I might add the fire in his house went out every night so Joan and I woke each day to temperatures below freezing in our bedroom. George and Terri did not have indoor plumbing so each day, we carefully planned our outing to the outhouse to make sure it was as warm as possible and we would not spend any wasted time on their outdoor throne.

Naturally, without indoor plumbing any water in their cabin had to be pumped into two holding tanks in their cabin by way of a hose attached to their well. Once that ritual was accomplished the challenge was to gather the hose before the water froze in it.

When it comes to bread, they purchased bread in town but they had very limited access to fresh vegetables or fruit or even poultry.

They hit their first 40 degrees below temperature in November and it will continue to be that cold up until March. They will have some 50 degrees below temperatures in January and February.

Some of you may be thinking why would anyone want to live there?

The year of our visit, there were only 5 believers in their entire town. Today, there is a growing church. George led a community center that impacts the leaders of their

community as well as the poorest of the poor. The church that his team started is the only church in the entire community. Why was he there? Before becoming a missionary our son first prayed our father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come thy will be done.

Pray that way and it will give you a perspective on how to pray "give us this day our daily bread."

The Promise We Need to Embrace

Finally, there is a promise that we need to claim. Don't worry!

We've already noted that in his commentary on the 4th petition Jesus says don't worry about bread!

He adds, "look at the birds." In the springtime after a rain, you don't see some bird out plucking its wings, moaning about how they can't find worms. Birds will scratch and they'll peck, and they'll find worms, so they don't have to worry about food.

Finally, he says, as you look

at the lilies, even Solomon's temple, in all its regal glory, was not adorned like them. The point is lilies don't worry. They don't worry about their raiment. And neither should you, because we've got a Father in heaven who loves us and cares about us and who's going to adorn us even more regally than he's adorned the lilies. So seek Ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. And you won't have to worry about bread.

A man's daughter asked the local priest to come and pray for her father. When the priest arrived he found the man's head propped up by two pillows and an empty chair by his bed.

Seeing the chair, the priest assumed that the old man had been informed of his visit.

"I guess you were expecting me," he said.

"No, who are you."

"I am the associate at your parish the priest replied. When I saw the empty chair I figured that you knew I was coming."

"O yeah, the chair," said the bed ridden man. "Would you mind closing the door?"

Puzzled, the priest shut the door.

"I never told anyone about this not even my daughter" said the man. "But all of my life I have never known how to pray."

"At the Sunday mass I used to hear the pastor talk about prayer but it always went right over my head. I had abandoned any attempt at prayer the old man continued. About 4 years ago my best friend said to me, 'Joe, prayer is just a simple matter of having a conversation with Jesus. Here is what I suggest. Sit down in a chair and set an empty chair across from you and in faith see Jesus on the chair. It is not spooky because Jesus himself promised I will be with you always. Then just speak to him and listen in the same way you are doing with me now.' I tried it and I like it so much that I do it a couple hours every day. I am careful though. If my daughter saw me talking to an empty chair, she might have a nervous breakdown. Or send me off to the funny farm."

The priest was deeply moved by the story and encouraged the old guy to continue on the journey. Then he prayed with and anointed him with oil and returned to the rectory.

Two days later, the daughter called to say that her father had died that afternoon.

“Did he seem to die in peace,” the priest asked.

“Yes, when I left the house about 2 o’clock he called me over to his bedside told me one of his corny jokes and kissed me on the cheek. When I got back from the store an hour later I found him dead.

But there was something strange in fact beyond strange. It was actually a bit weird. Apparently, just before daddy died he leaned over and rested his head on the chair that was by his bedside and then he died.”

So then, if we are praying “give us this day our daily bread” how will that change the way we pray?

1. We should pray daily for the poor of the world. Specifically, we should pray that God provide them with daily bread. That prayer should lead us personally to give financially to meet the needs of the poor. Also, we should be willing to offer our time and energy to enable the poor of the world to acquire their daily bread.

2. If we take this petition seriously, we should experience tension because we know that no matter how much we give there will still be countless millions who go to bed hungry every night. That realization should motivate

us to pray that God help us communicate to the poor of the world the truth communicated in Matthew 6:33. If all we do is seek bread, we will likely stay hungry. If instead, we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, God will give us what we need! Practically then, if we commit ourselves only to proclaiming the “social gospel” we will fall short of fulfilling our responsibility to meet the needs of the poor. Until the poor have a personal relationship with Jesus, they are likely to feel and be poor. When they become Christ followers, they can understand what it means to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. This petition then requires us to care for the actual physical needs of the poor without forgetting our obligation to proclaim the Gospel to them.

3. We need to hear Jesus’ challenge for us to stop worrying about what we will wear, where we will live and what we will eat. We need to remind ourselves that as God takes care of the birds and the lilies of the field, He will take care of us. So how about you? Are you a worry wart? If you are honest, do you think too much about your retirement plan, your next job, your next paycheck?

CS Lewis has warned us of the dangers of praying, “give me this day my daily bread.” If we understand the Lord’s Prayer, we will long for a deeper relationship with our heavenly Father and with our brother and sisters in Christ. Pray that way and one day you too can lay your head on the empty chair as you prepare to spend eternity in heaven with Jesus and all those friends for whom you have faithfully prayed, “Give us this day our daily bread!”

