

LORD, Teach Us to Pray – Part 5

Last Sunday we began looking at the second half of the prayer Jesus is teaching us to pray, at the section which addresses those concerns for our daily needs, and we noted that the second half naturally grows out of the first section of the prayer, where God and His concerns are first and foremost addressed. Another way of stating this, is that the kinds of requests we have ARE BECAUSE of the kind of God He is. Yet, another way of stating this is that we couldn't ask for the things we are taught to ask for IF God wasn't the kind of God we are addressing in prayer.

The central idea of Jesus' teaching on prayer has been our dependence upon God as our Father and therefore, as His children, the submission of our desires to His. What this means then is that our praying grows out of our need, perhaps at times our desperate need (cf. **Heb. 4:14-16**), for the God to whom we pray. The Psalmist beautifully expresses this sense of our need for God:

To You I lift up my eyes, O You who are enthroned in the heavens! ² Behold, as the eyes of servants *look* to the hand of their master, As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, So our eyes *look* to the LORD [YAHWEH] our God, Until He is gracious to us (**Psalm 123:1-2**).

You will remember the immediate stories preceding our LORD's teaching on prayer: the story of the Good Samaritan (**Luke 10:30-37**) and the story of Mary and Martha entertaining their house-guest, Jesus (**vv. 38-42**). You will also remember that those two stories grow out of the discussion that Jesus had with the lawyer about the first and second great commandments: to love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind AND to love your neighbor as yourself (**vv. 25-28**). (1) The commandment to love God with your whole being looks like Mary choosing her "good portion" by sitting at the feet of Jesus, with her eyes fixed on her rabbi, ready to obey every word that proceeds from the mouth of her LORD (**vv. 38, 42**). Further, (2) what loving your neighbor as yourself looks like is when a Samaritan, who though he is despised by the Jews, yet he is willing to sacrifice his valuable time and expenses to help one of them who has fallen into desperate need. And he does so even when those who were the most likely to help – the ministers of the temple of God – refused to help their brother in need (**vv. 30-37**).

What ties these stories to Jesus' teaching on prayer is how Jesus ended the story of the Good Samaritan with the command, "Go and do likewise" (v. 37; we should also expect Jesus to say the same about Mary). The question that will most likely arise after reading such stories is: how can we possibly love like Jesus is showing us? How can we possibly love God and love our neighbor like that? The answer is obvious once we notice that Jesus then follows all those stories up with His teaching on prayer, as if to say, all that you will need to love like this BEGINS HERE on your knees before God. Your strength to love as Jesus loved us and taught us how to love will not be found naturally in you. It will only flow out of your communion with your *Abba*, Father. You will only be able *to begin* to imitate Him after you have spent much time with Him, in His presence, sitting at His

throne, learning how much He loves you, which is far more than you can possibly imagine (cf. **Lk. 11:13; Matt. 5:44-48**).

One other point I would like to draw your attention to this morning, before we return to our discussion of the fourth petition, is to again notice the beauty of the simplicity of the prayer we are learning to pray. This simplicity is important for various reasons, but I remind you of something we said last week, towards the end of our time together, about how Jesus instructs us to approach God like little children (cf. **Luke 18:15-17; also see 10:19-24**). What Jesus meant by this probably has something to do with how readily children trust their parents. Children are very good at asking their parents for anything and everything AND are very trusting that their parents will only give to them what is good for them (vv. **11-13**). That is how Jesus wants us to ask our *Abba* for our daily needs. But, think about this with me for a moment – because the Kingdom of God also belongs to the little ones in our lives Jesus teaches us to pray a prayer that is so simple that it can be easily understood and memorized by the youngest child among us, as they too learn how to pray.

That is what is so beautiful about the simplicity of our LORD's teaching on prayer. It is so simple that even the youngest children among us – the children who are in covenant with Jesus can easily memorize the prayer, imitate it, and begin praying it back to God, their heavenly Father, from a very young age. Yet, the simplicity of the prayer in no way robs even the oldest saints among us, who have prayed this prayer every day for their entire Christian life, of the incredible and amazing depth of addressing the heavenly Father, while using this prayer.

As St. Gregory the Great once described the Word of God, prayer itself is “like a river, broad and deep, shallow enough here for the lamb to go wading, but deep enough there for the elephant to swim” (see *Commentary on Job, Moral. Inscr.*, CCL 143:6).

The Meaning of the Word: “Daily”

Within the history of the church, there has been some disagreement as to the interpretation of a particular word within the petition. That difficult word is normally translated “daily” (“*epiousious*”), as in “daily bread,” and this term appears to have been coined by the Evangelists for this prayer (see Origen, *De Orat.* 27,7; cf. **Matt. 6:11; Lk. 11:3**). Notice that even reading the petition with this translation seems to be redundant: “Give us *each day*, our *daily* bread.” What was Jesus meaning? There have been basically two interpretations given to the word “daily.”

1. The traditional interpretation of the church is that “daily” simply refers to “today's provision of the disciples' need for food” or, a little more broadly, to include all those provisions that we need every day to survive – something like, “our daily subsistence.” Here the prayer is asking God to provide all that is necessary for us to survive; we are asking for the necessary provisions of life. This is an adequate interpretation, even though, as we already said, it is a bit redundant. Clearly, Israel needed daily food to survive in the wilderness. Without food, they would perish. God gives them just enough to survive every day. **Ex. 16:18** tells us that whether they gathered more or less they

always had just enough, neither lacking nor wasting. They were always satisfied by what they gathered. Therefore, simply enough, as Israel was cared for everyday in the wilderness, then we too, as the disciples of Jesus, are cared for by God with our daily portion of what we need as we journey to the Promised Land of the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Now this may be all that Jesus is teaching us to ask God for in the fourth petition. Jesus wants us to come to our heavenly Father each and every day to ask Him to meet our daily needs.

You may wonder why God wants us to ask “daily”? Surely, we could put our order in for a month, or even a year, in advance? In fact, the *Amidah* prayer (*Shemoneh Esreh*, or 18 Benedictions, nos. 9 & 18), which was the common Jewish daily prayer of Jesus' day, asked God to supply their needs annually, matching the annual planting and harvesting of their crops. In any way it doesn't seem very economical of our time or God's time to have to bother with “daily” needs. So, do you think God is wanting us to learn something about Him by coming before Him each and every day to ask Him for what we need?

Let's turn, again this week, to **Exodus 16** and see if we can find an answer as to why God wants us to come before Him each and every day to ask for our daily needs. Read **Ex. 16:16-19** → **Now, why did Moses tell them this in v. 19? What was God trying to teach them? vv. 20-21.** They wanted to store up extra for the lean days ahead (“left part of it until morning”) when God, acting like their former Egyptian masters, forgot to feed them. They worried today about the future provisions, whether there was going to be enough to eat or drink for them and their family. Think of how often we *worry* about tomorrow. That is why Jesus had to instruct us not only in how to pray but also how not to worry about what we prayed for:

³¹ “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ ³² “For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴ “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own (**Matt. 6:31-34**).

I can remember years ago when Y2K was fast approaching and how many people I met lived in absolute dread of what that day would bring. Even back then the internet was a-buzz with dire warnings of how the sky was going to fall and anyone who hadn't prepared would be left destitute. Many stock-piled large amounts of food and water just in case God failed to provide their daily bread then they would be sure to have those daily provisions covered ahead of time. And yet Jesus cautioned us:

Matthew 6:25–26 (NASB95)

²⁵ “For this reason I say to you, **do not be worried about your life**, *as to* what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. Is not life more than food,

and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ “Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and *yet* your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?

While God is not opposed to your wisely preparing for the future, even storing up provisions for a rainy day, He is opposed to you worrying about tomorrow, whether or not God is going to provide for you and your family. It is in being so anxious about tomorrow that you forget to seek first His Kingdom today, which basically means that you forget to trust your heavenly Father who loves you.

This is the essential difference between between Israel and her wilderness testing VERSUS Jesus, the true Israel, and His wilderness testing. When Satan tested Jesus saying, “If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread” (Lk. 4:3; Matt. 4:3). Satan wanted Jesus to grumble and complain against God and, like Israel, put God to the test. For Satan to win, all he needed to do was to get Jesus to turn one stone into a loaf of bread and that would have proven that Jesus was like Israel and did not trust His heavenly Father to provide for Him when God chose to open His hand and feed His Son. But no matter how hungry Jesus became He trusted His heavenly Father. He knew His Father loved Him and Jesus responded instead, “It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God'” (Matt. 4:4; Lk. 4:4). Jesus knew there was something far greater than having our bellies full – and that is in trusting God, that He will fully take care of His children.

That is why Jesus wants you too to go before the throne of God today – each and every day – and ask Him to give you today's bread. He wants you to know what He knows!! Your Father in heaven can be trusted like no other BECAUSE He loves you like no other. And when you finish today and you find that today's bread was enough for today – then you will go again tomorrow and ask Him again tomorrow for that day's worth of bread. It is through the daily repetition of asking God each day AND seeing Him provide each day that He is teaching you that you can fully trust Him even as you trust your own earthly father. In fact, if your earthly father, who is evil, worked to the bone to give you what you needed, how much more do you think your Heavenly Father, who is truly good, will provide for you in your time of need (vv. 11-13)? And if God sustains you, each and every day, for the most basic, mundane needs you have had over your life, don't you think you will be more ready to trust Him in those more difficult, darker days ahead?

But what was God ultimately teaching Israel in the wilderness, and more importantly, what is He teaching us, by providing Israel with this heavenly bread, called “manna” (cf. 1 Cor. 10:3-4; John 6)? Was God's primary goal in this provision merely/simply to teach them that He will daily care for their physical, temporal needs, OR was there a greater lesson to be learned? Was there another level of this provision that God was pointing to in the gift of daily manna? And therefore, is there a greater/fuller level of understanding of the fourth petition of the prayer?

There is something in the story in Ex. 16 that tells us that God is concerned with much more than the mere natural/physical bread of life. I am not saying that the daily provision for physical bread is absent and even unimportant – just go a day or so without it and you will find out just how

important your daily portion is. In fact, Paul goes so far to say:

For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.⁸ If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content (**1 Tim. 6:7-8**).

Solomon suggested:

Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion (**Prov. 30:8**).

What I am suggesting is that there is clearly something much fuller in the story that we need to see.

There are a couple of things to take notice of right off the bat: (1) The bread itself was not bread that the children of Israel went out and labored to produce. Unlike their oppressors in Egypt, Israel's King provides for their needs through gifts of His mercy and grace. Divine Love daily put food on their tables.

²⁷ They all wait for You To give them their food in due season. ²⁸ You give to them, they gather it up; You open Your hand, they are satisfied with good (**Ps. 104:27-28; vv. 14-15**).

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows (**Ps. 23:5**).

¹⁵ The eyes of all look to You, And You give them their food in due time. ¹⁶ You open Your hand And satisfy the desire of every living thing (**Ps. 145:15-16; 146:5-7**).

In fact, He provides for their needs with a Heavenly gift – the bread from Heaven was given out of the abundance of His infinite resources in Heaven. Also, (2) you will remember that it was on the sixth day that God gave Israel a double portion for the present day and the following Sabbath day. On every other day, if you carry any bread over to the next day, it will spoil. God was teaching them to trust Him that tomorrow's bread will come when it is needed. But for the Sabbath day, the bread that is provided "ahead of time" will satisfy them on both days. It is this aspect of a "double portion" ahead of time that provides such an insight into what Jesus is saying the fourth petition.

2. We mentioned earlier the first of two interpretations of the word, "daily." The traditional interpretation is simply that Jesus is teaching us to ask God today to give to us what we need to live. "Daily bread" would then be "today's bread." **But** there is another possible interpretation of the term "daily," that translates the term as "tomorrow's bread" or the bread for the "coming day" (see the footnote in your modern translations, NASB95; ESV). So that, what Jesus is actually saying, "Give us today, out of tomorrow's provision." The whole petition then takes on an *eschatological nuance*, which certainly fits with the previous petitions for the hallowing of God's name and the yearning for God's Kingdom to come.

Now, when did Israel receive "tomorrow's bread"? The only day they received a double-portion was on the day before the Sabbath (see **Ex. 16:5, 22-26**). Now, think about the vital lesson that God was teaching Israel week-in and week-out by providing for them for their needs for the Sabbath Day

ahead of time. God was teaching Israel that it was out of the resources of the future Sabbath Day that God was now providing for their present, daily needs.

Now, think back to what the purpose of the Sabbath Day served for Israel. It was a weekly reminder, a covenantal sign (**Ex. 31:12-17**) of Israel's entrance into God's rest in the Promise Land (**see Ex. 16:27-30**). It served as an eschatological sign for them, while they were in their wilderness wanderings of the future promise of rest into which God was delivering them. This was the same purpose of the Sabbath that was given to Adam. The Sabbath reminded Adam of the promised, future rest in the glorified Heavens and Earth. So, on those days when God gave a double-portion of manna He was pointing the spiritual eyes of His children forward to a promised day of salvation when He would give them ultimate rest from their weak and wearied lives.

This is what Jesus was drawing Israel's eyes to when He fed the 5,000 with only five barley loaves and two small fish (**cf. John 6:1-14**). He Himself is the true manna from heaven – He is “tomorrow's bread,” the true, living bread of life (**cf. John 6:22-40**) that comes to you today (here and now) out of the resources of the eternal Sabbath-rest of God - to provide for your most immediate and vital need of the day – your eternal salvation!

In other words, God is taking out of the richness of the blessing of the Age to Come to provide for all of your needs within this present age, rooted and grounded in the most important need of all – your salvation (**cf. Eph. 1:3; “eschatological provision of salvation”**). While you are sojourning within the wilderness period, even as Israel journeyed in their wilderness pilgrimage to the promised land, God is taking out of the blessings of the future land of promise to provide for your present needs. And if God is willing to give you the eternal bread - Jesus, will He not also with Him also give you your daily physical bread (**cf. Rom. 8:32**)?

It is not that the previous interpretation of “daily” is entirely wrong in what it says. It is just that it suffers from the same shortsightedness of Israel in the wilderness by focusing the whole petition on merely the immediate/temporary concerns of man.

Rather, God gave the children of Israel “manna from heaven” which was preaching to them of a far greater/living bread - Jesus Christ - who would come down from Heaven to satisfy and fill God's people (**1 Cor. 10:3-4; John 6**). Even in **Ex. 16**, earthly bread was never the main point. Even so, in the fourth petition, earthly resources are not **ultimately** what we are requesting. Rather, they are Heavenly resources (signs pointing to Jesus; **cf. Eph. 1:3**). They are the spiritual, Heavenly blessings of our union with Jesus Christ. He is the True Bread of Life and as we continue to feast upon Him (Holy Communion) we are those who no longer hunger, in fact, we are those who will never hunger again (**cf. John 4:14; 6:35**). Come let us feast on the Living Bread that has come down out of Heaven and know that the One who is giving Him to us will also with Him freely give us all things (**Rom. 8:32**).

Amen!

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