

Daily Bread

Matthew 6:11

By [Rev. Kevin Chiarot](#)

We are continuing our series on the Sermon on the Mount, and we are in the middle of the Lord's Prayer. This morning, we transition to the second half of the prayer. The first three petitions are concerned with God and his glory: Hallowed by thy name, thy kingdom come, and thy will be done. Today, with the fourth petition, give us this day our daily bread, we turn to our needs and concerns.

We like to talk a lot here about order and proportion. First things first, second things second. Big things big, little things little. First order things central, other stuff peripheral. It is the key to Christian maturity. And the Lord's Prayer shapes us in this. God and his glory first – not only first, but second and third – then we address our needs. But it's important to state that we DO, in fact, address our needs. Now, it is true that much praying seems obsessed with us, and very little concerned with God's name and glory.

Nevertheless, in their place, the concerns we have as creatures are legitimate subjects for prayer. It's important to say this – our concern with God – and putting him first- never obliterates our concrete practical human situation, it is possible to be over-spiritual, and this petition is something of a safeguard against that. With that, we will make four points. The Practical, the Posture, the Portion, and the Prospect. Repeat.

I. The Practical

First, then, the practical. Many of the early fathers of the church did in fact display a kind of over-spirituality when it came to this petition. Partly because of the unique Greek word translated "daily bread," they thought Jesus must be talking here about the eucharist, or about spiritual bread. For he wouldn't put our basic, bodily needs right after his Glory – especially in a prayer where all the petitions are about spiritual realities.

But the father's were wrong here – or they were at least half-wrong. It is part of the wondrous glory of the Lord's Prayer that, in its brevity, its economy, it is so comprehensive. It shows God's concern for great things and small things, for spiritual and material things, for inner and outer things, for eternal and temporal things. The petition establishes that God cares, about the details, about the

basics of our lives. That he who is transcendent Father IN HEAVEN condescends to look out for, to watch after his children. From the hair on our heads, to the falling of sparrows, to the lilies of the field, God shows his intimate concern with the seemingly insignificant, with the trivial, with the bodily necessities of life.

In fact, daily bread is to be taken as a part which stands in for the whole. That is, under the heading of daily bread, the petition embraces all the temporal needs and blessings of life. Luther saw bread as a symbol for “everything necessary for the preservation of this life, like food, a healthy body, good weather, house, home, wife, children, good government and peace.” For it turns out, of course, that these things are not so little and inconsequential after all. For we are embodied creatures and if one suffers from hunger or homelessness or the violence of war – the effects don’t remain in some physical compartment of life, without spilling over to your soul. In fact, Jesus will judge us on how well we do on being his instruments to provide these basic temporal bodily needs for the poor.

So, the practical needs of the outward, bodily, temporal order – cannot be denigrated -- they are of great concern to our Father. So much so, that they are the first thing we pray for, AFTER we have attended to his glory. That’s the practical.

II. The Posture

Our second point is the posture. By posture, I mean that there is, here, in this petition, an attitude toward God and toward life under God, that we must adopt. And it has a deep theological backdrop, which is seen vividly in the WLC Q. 193 – which is on this petition. The answer, before it actually says what we pray for, gives us a preface. A backdrop. Acknowledging X, Y, and Z – COLON - we pray for. Here’s what we acknowledge before we even pray: Acknowledging, that in Adam, and by our own sin, we have forfeited our right to all the outward blessings of this life and deserve to be wholly deprived of them by God, and to have them cursed to us in the use of them.

And that neither they of themselves are able to sustain us, nor we to merit, or by our own industry to procure them; but prone to desire, get, and use them unlawfully – COLON – we pray for. Does anyone take that posture in praying this petition? We are so blind, and puffed up, and self-sufficient. We are not even aware of the absence of our sense of unworthiness. As if we are owed bread.

But this supplication places us in a posture of humility. It is the spirit of people who say: We need you, O Lord, even for our daily bread. In other words, the ethos of the beatitudes is on display here. As one scholar put it: this is not the prayer of the complacent and self-satisfied, but of the humble, the lowly, the

broken, the desperate, the meek who will inherit the earth. We don't petition God for our daily bread, because we are already filled and not hungry, because we are rich and not poor, because we have weeks' worth of food already on hand.

And so we know nothing of this sort of desperate, daily petition. This is the cry, the posture of the poor in spirit – give us this day our daily bread. This the prayer of one who grasps that we are upheld in being, sustained in existence, in our very bodily state, by the goodness, power and provision of God.

That, in fact, all things, from rain to raiment come to us from his hand. All that we have -even if we have stuff stored up in advance – all that we have, and all that we continue to have, we have at his good pleasure. As David prayed: Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

James tells us: Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Paul speaks the same way: For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? For from him and through him and for him are all things. We have forgotten this – or at least we are prone to. Maybe its because we work hard for what we have. And the means of labor is not erased by this petition. God uses ordinary means. Human labor, human planning and distribution. He uses all this to provide us with our bread, our temporal necessities. But at every point it is his strength, his gifting, his making the world a place which yields food and other marvels, under the hand of human intelligence, that we often become numb to.

And so we speak of food in economic terms or production terms – and all the goods we enjoy, we start to see them in mechanical terms as if they just arise apart from God. As if food just sprouting out of the ground was not an astonishing wonder. As if all the necessities and niceties of life are the result of NOTHING but human labor. Who made the human? Who upholds the human in being? Who gave the human a mind? Who made that mind to grasp and be in synch with the external world? Who gives life and breathe? Who sustains the natural order? And on and on. The petition, prayed thoughtfully, allows us to see afresh: God as the source of ALL life, the author of EVERY good gift.

Put differently, the prayer instills in us a posture of deep, daily dependence. We are not manufacturing this sense of dependence – it is just the restoration of reality. It reminds us that we are creatures. That we are asking for alms – GIVE US this day our daily bread – that we are beggars dependent on the royal bounty of God. And two things flow from this dependence – and they are absent from our lives precisely because we've lost the sense of dependence.

The first, is gratitude. In the posture of receivers, we see that all is gift. And when all is gift, gratitude follows. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving. Dependence creates gratitude.

Secondly, it creates contentment. This petition strips us, not only of self-sufficiency, but of covetousness. Grateful, content people do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For they depend on their heavenly Father, who knows what they need. Godliness with contentment, Paul says, is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. That's the posture.

III. The Portion

Our third point is the portion. We pray for God to give us today our daily bread (the word for "daily bread" either means today's bread or tomorrow's (perhaps future) bread). So, if you prayed this in the morning, it would mean "give us today's bread" If it you prayed it in the evening it would mean give us tomorrow's bread. In Luke, Jesus says: Give us EACH DAY our daily bread.

The point is-- the timeframe is short. We are not asking for enough to hoard or store indefinitely. We live moment by moment, day by day, from God's hand. And we are asking for what our catechisms call "a competent portion" – that is, an appropriate amount, neither excessive nor deficient, leaving it to God's wisdom to determine what is a competent portion for each.

This prayer is anticipated by the prayer of Proverbs 30 which says: give me neither poverty nor riches but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God. It is bread that we pray for, not dessert. And its daily nature teaches us that we are not to lust for more. In the words of the 5th c. bishop John Chrysostom:

"Note how even in things bodily, spiritual concerns abound. For it is not for riches or frills that we pray, It is not for wastefulness or extravagant clothing that we pray, but only for bread. And only for bread on a daily basis, so as not to 'worry about tomorrow'."

Even here, when we pray for temporal goods – even goods like food – we need to be reminded that we are part of a community, part of a body, and our prayers are never merely about or for us. Remember this is the OUR Father, not the "My Father." And notice, the plural, corporate praying is not left behind here. Give US today OUR daily bread. Us and Our. The prayer cements our solidarity with our brothers and sisters, especially those in need. For part of the reason that God gives us abundance, when he gives us a competent portion of his goods, is that

we might share them with the needy. Any excess in our portion needs to be at the disposal of the needs of the community. For we are praying with and for others when we ask for our daily bread.

IV. The Prospect

Finally, the prospect. By this I mean the future. The fathers were not completely wrong to see the prayer as pointing to spiritual bread. Their error was to overlook the concrete practical nature of the request. But it does point forward. There is, in speaking of daily bread, or tomorrow's future bread, a reminder (an evoking of, as almost all scholars see here) of the manna from heaven which God provided for Israel in her wilderness pilgrimage.

And once one makes this connection – which the text is definitely making. One is lifted out and up into the whole theology of bread and feasting in Scripture. For the manna was both daily bread AND a type of Jesus Christ, who identifies that manna as fulfilled in Himself. We heard this in the gospel lesson from John 6:

“I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Thus the daily bread DOES direct us to heavenly bread. As Calvin puts it: “Scripture regularly teaches us from the taste of present goods to hope for heavenly ones.” In this very gospel, when Jesus feeds the 4K and then the 5K – a provision of a real bodily need, he uses the same verbs he uses later when instituting the Supper. He takes, blesses, breaks, gives. He is connecting feeding the masses with the gift of his body and blood, given to us in the Eucharist.

All bread and all meals – point to the Supper. To the bread that endures to eternal life. All temporal gifts – point us to Christ – THE gift of God. He is the ultimate bread of tomorrow. And thus, with this apparently simple petition, we end up where we seem to always end up: At the wedding Supper of the Lamb, reclining at table, with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with all the saints of all ages. With the US and the OUR with whom (for whom) we prayed for daily bread.

At the feast where daily bread is no longer fragile or scarce or subject to misuse or a matter of anxiety. The feast which has become everlasting communion and indestructible life, where today is the today of eternity, and the bread is a perpetual feeding on Christ, the bread of heaven, the living bread, in light and in resurrection glory forever. Amen.

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