

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

February 21, 2010 Praying for Daily Bread

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Dear Radio Friends,

Over the past weeks we have been looking at Jesus' answer to the disciples' request: "Lord, teach us to pray." In answer, Jesus gave them a prayer that we commonly call the Lord's Prayer. Or it could be called the Disciples' Prayer. This prayer, found in Matthew 6 and Luke 11, is a pattern for all true prayer. Today we are going to consider the request: "Give us this day our daily bread," which is a prayer for our earthly needs.

Before I explain the words of this petition, notice that this is the fourth petition and not the first. Before this petition for our earthly needs, Jesus placed three petitions that relate directly to God and His interests: His name, His kingdom, and His will. This is a reminder to us that prayer is more than a request for our needs. Prayer is, first praise of God. And as we come, to our needs, we must remember that we still stand before God in this world. In all the physical dimensions of our daily life—our work, our eating, our doctors' visits, our dress, our family, our health—we stand as servants of God. And so, as God gives us what we need, we are under obligation to render worship to Him with these things. He does not give us what we need for our own ends and own purposes, but for us to use to His glory.

Jesus teaches us here to say, "Give us this day our daily bread." This simple petition is profound both in what it teaches about God and in its implications for the Christian life. Each word has something to teach us. I want to break it down, word by word, for you today.

There are four main words in this petition. The first word is "give." There are two ways that you can use that word. Sometimes it is used to express a demand: Give me that thing. That is a demand. The other way is to use it as a request. And that is what it is here. We do not demand things of God. First we say, as Jesus taught: "Our Father, which art in heaven." Then we say, "Give us this day our daily bread." That is a request and not a demand.

And when we say this to God, "*give us*," we confess that everything that we have is a divine gift. That is very easily forgotten. In our abundance, we overlook God the giver. As we work for food and earn money to buy our necessities we forget that God is the One who supplies all things to us, also through our daily labor. We should not take for granted our daily bread. It is a gift from God.

Second, we pray in this petition, "Give *us* our daily bread." That makes this a corporate prayer, a prayer for other believers; a prayer for other members of my family; indeed, a prayer for the necessities of all men. And this makes sense. We are so interdependent on one another for our necessities. One person plows the field. Another person plants the field. Another person cares for the plants. Another one harvests the crop. Another one grinds the grain. Another one bakes the bread. Another sells the bread or delivers the bread. Another prepares the meal. We all need one another for our daily necessities. And so we pray for one another. I pray this not only for myself, but also for my employer; not only for my family, but also for my neighbor's family; not only for my business or place of employment, but for the entire economy. We pray that God will give us an environment in which it is fit for people to live; in which our necessities may be met; and in which we may remain physically healthy.

The third word here is "*this day*," or "today," and "daily." "Give us *this day* our *daily* bread." One thing that these words teach us is that we ought to pray daily. Have you prayed today? But these words are not so much about time, but about quantity. How much can we ask of God? How much bread should we ask from Him? And the answer is, enough for today. This is how God often supplied the needs of His people in the Bible. When Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years, each day they were supplied with just the amount of manna they needed for that day. And if they were greedy and took more, they had a smelly mess to clean up the next morning as the bread rotted and stank. Just enough for today. When Elijah was all alone at the brook Cherith, and again, when Elijah was with the widow at Zarephath, his supply of food came from God's hand each day.

And so, with these words: "this day" and "daily," Jesus is teaching us that we should have an attitude of dependence rather than greed or self-reliance. We are taught to be moderate in our requests; to trust God; not to be anxious about tomorrow; and to have the confidence that if God is meeting my needs today, He will meet them also tomorrow.

And that brings us to the fourth and last word in this petition that we want to consider. That is the word "bread." Give us this day our daily *bread*.

With this word Jesus places a restriction on what we may ask of God. Bread. What is "bread"? Well, bread is a very basic necessity. It is the staple of a person's diet. Most basic. Probably the cheapest food with which to fill your stomach. Every culture makes some kind of bread. And whether in a form of a roll or a loaf or a muffin or a cracker or a crumpet or a rice cake or a tortilla, bread is enough to meet our need for food. Jesus is saying, "That's what you pray for. You're not to pray for bread and butter. You're not to pray for bread and meat; for meat and potatoes; but simply bread." He is telling us not to ask for the luxuries of life but for the basic necessities of life—not for riches but for enough.

And, at the same time, that means that we may ask for all things necessary for our body and for physical health. In referring to bread, Jesus refers to all our needs. Having bread is not all there is to our needs. It is much more complex, including all the means that God provides to meet our needs. This includes economics and weather, politics and peace, social order and employment. We live in this world, and there are so many things that play a role in getting bread onto the table. All these things are included in this prayer. God controls all these things. And He must order the climatic and the agricultural and the economic and the political conditions to insure that our needs are met.

So these are the words that Jesus gives. They are rather ordinary. From our point of view, we are not asking God for anything great or outstanding. And that teaches us that, when it comes to our physical well-being, there is no necessity too small to ask of God in prayer. Nothing is beyond God's knowledge and control.

Now, as we pray these words, we are making not only a petition for ourselves, but also a confession about God. This is very important. That is why we need to make this petition. Maybe you have listened to what I just said about earthly necessities and you think, well, I have plenty—I have my daily bread, my health, all my necessities—so there's no need for me to make this petition. Then you should understand that this petition is also a confession that every child of God should make about God. When we pray this petition, we are saying some things about God.

One thing that we are confessing is that God is the sovereign owner and giver of all things. That is why we must ask Him for our earthly needs. In Psalm 24, the first two verses:

The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.

God is the Creator. So all things belong to Him and come from Him.

In the book of Haggai, chapter 2 and verse 8, the prophet, from the mouth of the Lord, says, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts." When we make this petition, that is what we acknowledge. And that is true even though we must work to obtain our food and income. Still it comes from God. The strength, the ability, the opportunity to work are all from God. The fields that produce our food, the rain and the sunshine, the crops, the seasons, the milk from the grocery store—all of it is from the hand of God. He supplies the needs of all His creatures.

In Psalm 104 this is put very beautifully. Beginning in verse 10, this is what God does:

He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst.He watereth the hills from his chambers; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth..... He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down. Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God. The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens. Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening. O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.

All these things are a part of God's order and creation and under His sovereign control.

Another thing that we are confessing about God in this petition is that God cares not only for our souls, but also for our bodies; not only for our spiritual needs, but also for our physical needs. Maybe somebody says that bread and health are not important enough to make requests about to God. They are too mundane. And so he takes this petition and wants to spiritualize it and make bread here symbolic of Jesus, the bread of God, come down from heaven. In the history of the church, that has been done with this petition. But we must not do that with these words of Jesus. This is about food. The petition is down-to-earth. It is not wrong for us to pray for such things, because God cares about our bodies. He saves our bodies as well as our souls. He made our bodies. The Bible tells us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. And God created food as the way for our bodies to maintain health.

And then, too, God Himself, in His Son Jesus Christ, came into our human flesh. In His body, Jesus cared for Himself and He had a concern for the physical well-being of others. You can read the miracles of healing and of feeding the hungry. Our God sends His Holy Spirit into the hearts of His redeemed, so that the Scriptures can say, "Your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit." Someday God will raise these bodies and remake them like the glorious body of His Son. So, not only must we take care of our bodies and make them holy, but God has concern for them. And because He does, we are to ask for our physical needs from Him.

That is the meaning of this petition. And when we understand it, we see that it is very practical. It changes our outlook on life. It changes our relationship to the things of this world.

There are four things that should result from this petition in our lives as Christians in this world. Making this petition, we should, first, acknowledge God with thanksgiving for everything that He has given us. The thankful person is someone who acknowledges God and who points to God as the giver.

The Scriptures tell us that we should be thankful *in* everything, and *for* everything (Eph. 5:20 and I Thess. 5:18). So often, though, as we look at our life, it is quite different. We compare what God has given to us to what He has given to others. And we become envious and we despise the things that He has given us rather than being thankful.

Think about it. Have you ever had to go without food and be hungry? Have you ever had to wonder where your next meal will come from? Have you ever been left out in the street with nowhere to sleep, with less than your necessities? If God has given you the things that you need for today, then you ought to be thankful to Him.

Second, this petition should throw us in trust on God and make us stop trusting the things of this earth. Very often we think that our food and our prosperity will come from things like good weather and the sun and rain, from good investments, from the stock market, from an inheritance, from good financial decisions. And we begin to depend on things like this for our security, forgetting that nothing on this earth can be trusted, that any of these things could fail us at any time. And so we ought to rely upon God in good times as well as difficult times. Every person, rich or poor, needs to pray this petition. The more we have, the more we are tempted to trust in the things of this life rather than God. And so, the more one has, the more he ought to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread."

Third, praying this petition will produce contentment in our lives. Probably this is one of the hardest virtues for us to cultivate, by the grace of God, in our lives. We are always looking up at the next thing. We do that with houses, with vehicles, with clothes, with toys, and so on. We are always saying, "Well, if I could just get that, then I'd be happy." And while we are doing this, we are using earthly things as the standard for our contentment.

There are two things to remember about contentment. This is very important. First, contentment is an inner virtue of heart and mind that comes regardless of circumstances. Paul says in Philippians 4: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Through prayer and trusting in God, we can, you can, be content with what you have today.

Second, the standard for contentment should not be earthly things—should not be having more earthly things than what we have now. The standard for contentment should be this: our necessities are met today. Jesus defines them as daily bread. That is why the Scriptures say, "Having food and clothing, let us therewith be content." When we pray this petition, we are saying to God, "Lord, help me to be happy with the bare necessities of life." In Proverbs 30:8, 9 there is a prayer. I wonder, have you ever prayed this prayer? This is the prayer: "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me [that is, give me enough food—the amount of food that I need—for today]." Have you ever prayed that? "Lord, don't make me rich. Give me what I need, and happiness with it"? That is what Jesus is teaching us when He says, "Give us this day our daily bread."

And then, fourth, praying this petition should prompt us to use all things to the glory of God. In I Corinthians 10:31 we read, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." And it is saying this: that we must glorify God in the most ordinary of activities in our life, with the most simple things that God has given us. Going to church is not the only place and the only way to glorify God. You can glorify God, and you ought to, in every part of your life. You do not need great things to glorify God. If you, when you receive something as small as a piece of bread, acknowledge God as the One who has given it, and love Him for His care, and use your health to serve Him, that is glorifying to God. We should learn to use all that we have and all that are to love our God.

Do you pray this prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread"? Do you see why you must pray this petition? That you need the grace of God to help you to see God's hand in all things in your life? Do you respond with thanksgiving, with trust, with contentment, and with living to God's glory? You should—because nothing that you have is yours. And everything that you have is from God.

The disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray." In this petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," Jesus is teaching us to pray. Let us learn this lesson too.

Let us pray.

Lord and giver of life, giver of every good and perfect gift, help us to acknowledge Thy hand in our lives, to receive all things as from Thee, and to seek and depend on Thee even for our daily needs. And as we pray this day by day, give us contentment in our lives. We ask it for Jesus' sake, Amen.