

125. Q. What is the fourth petition?

A. Give us this day our daily bread. That is: Provide us with all our bodily needs so that we may acknowledge that Thou art the only fountain of all good, and that our care and labor, and also Thy gifts, cannot do us any good without Thy blessing. Grant, therefore, that we may withdraw our trust from all creatures and place it only in Thee.

When we pray “Give us this day our daily bread,”

we acknowledge that God alone is able to provide all that we need.

This petition is rooted in Jesus’ words,

“Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness,
and all these things will be added to you.” (Mt 6:33)

What are you concerned about?

Are you concerned about your job?

Your family?

Your future?

Jesus says that if we are fixated on our own needs, then we will miss the point of our existence.

But if we seek first his kingdom, then all that we need will be provided.

This is precisely what Psalm 78 teaches in story form.

Psalm 78 recites the history of Israel from the days of Moses through the time of David.

The opening two stanzas, verses 1-8,

emphasize the importance of teaching this story to your children.

Why do we spend so much time at Michiana Covenant teaching OT history?

Because Psalm 78 says that this story is crucial to show our children

“they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments;

and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation,
a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.”

In other words,

we teach our children to be more faithful than we have been!

Each of the next 5 stanzas begins with Israel’s rebellion and then show God’s mighty deeds:

1) Verses 9-16 starts with Ephraim’s forgetfulness –

“they forgot his works and the wonders that he had shown them.”

God divided the sea and let them pass through.

He led them with a pillar of cloud and fire.

He split rocks in the wilderness to give them water.

And yet they grumbled.

2) Verses 17-31 then report again the failure of Israel.

*Yet they sinned still more against him, rebelling against the Most High in the desert.
They tested God in their heart by demanding the food they craved.
They spoke against God, saying, "Can God spread a table in the wilderness?
He struck the rock so that water gushed out and streams overflowed.
Can he also give bread or provide meat for his people?" (v17-19)*

Hmm.
So they prayed, "give us this day our daily bread!"

When you learn to pray from Israel's history,
you discover that there is both a right way and wrong way to pray!
It's not about saying the right words.
It's about trusting the promises of God.
It's about being faithful to God's covenant.

He says that he will do what he has promised.
And he has promised to bless those who fear him, who love him, who obey him.

And the LORD heard their prayer.
And his anger burned against Israel.

And so he destroyed them, right?
No.
They deserved death for their sin and rebellion.

But the LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

*Yet he commanded the skies above and opened the doors of heaven,
and he rained down on them manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven.
Man ate of the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance. (v23-25)*

In Genesis, when God opened the doors of heaven,
the waters above poured out upon the earth,
the waters of judgment deluged the earth.
But this time God opens the doors of heaven,
and he gave them the "grain of heaven" – the "bread of angels."

But God is also just.
And while he gave them the bread of heaven,
he also "caused the east wind to blow in the heavens."
The east wind is always a herald of bad tidings.
The east wind blows across the desert –
it is a hot, dry wind that brings destruction.

But this time it brought birds – quail they are called in Number 11 –

and the people ate their fill.

But before they had satisfied their craving, while the food was still in their mouths, the anger of God rose against them, and he killed the strongest of them and laid low the young men of Israel. (30-31)

Be careful what you pray for.

Too often we do not pray “give us this day our daily bread” –
but rather, “give me what I crave.”

God may answer your prayer.

He may give you what you crave as a means of judging you for your cravings.

Because with all cravings – with all inordinate appetites –
you can stuff yourself with all that your heart desires,
and yet it will not satisfy.

Cravings, lusts, appetites are a vacuum that cannot be filled –
a black hole that consumes light and life and yet remains dark and lifeless.

And even as God gave Israel what they asked for,
so also he may give you what you crave.

So beware of trusting “providential” signs.

But what should Israel have done with the quail?

O, that is the wrong question!

By the time the quail arrived it was too late!

The problem was not that they ate the quail!

The problem was that they craved meat.

You need to learn to discipline your cravings.

What do you crave?

What good things (food, clothing, sex, friendship) do you love too much?

You need to deal with those cravings.

The problem with these cravings is that you cannot eliminate them entirely,
because they are desires for *good* things that God has placed within us.

But you need to discipline yourself to trust God for these things,
and not to insist upon them.

So if you crave food – if you love and enjoy food for its own sake,
then you need to develop the discipline of fasting.

If you crave your daily bread,

then there may be no way for you to pray “Give us this day our daily bread”
until you abstain from your daily bread,

trusting God that *he* will provide.

If you crave sex and you are married,
then it can be awfully easy to say “hey, let’s do it whenever I want!”
But Paul even speaks about married couples abstaining (fasting from sex, you might say)
for a time in order to devote themselves to prayer.

Whose kingdom are you seeking?

These things don’t change over night.

It takes discipline.

It takes commitment.

It takes faith, hope and love.

3) The third central stanza (verses 32-39)
summarizes the wilderness generation:

In spite of all this, they still sinned.

It didn’t matter how often God disciplined them.
They didn’t get it.

Asaph summarizes their conduct in verse 37:

Their heart was not steadfast toward him; they were not faithful to his covenant.

*But he, being compassionate, atoned for their iniquity and did not destroy them;
he restrained his anger often and did not stir up all his wrath.*

He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and comes not again.

4) Verses 40-55 then recounts all that Israel forgot.

All their rebellion – all their provocation of him in the wilderness –
all this was because they did not remember what God had done
or the day when he redeemed them from the foe.

We said earlier that Psalm 78 is a lesson to the children.

Children,

you need to know the stories of the Old Testament,
because if you don’t, then you will repeat them!

Verses 44-51 retell the story of the plagues of Egypt.

God warned that if his people did not obey him,
then he would send upon them the plagues of Egypt.

But in verses 52-55 we hear of the mercy of God.

*Then he led out his people like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.
He led them in safety, so that they were not afraid, but the sea overwhelmed their enemies.
And he brought them to his holy land, to the mountain which his right hand had won.
He drove out nations before them; he apportioned them for a possession
and settled the tribes of Israel in their tents.*

Would Israel learn?

Would the children learn from their fathers?

Psalm 78 is not so optimistic!

And Nehemiah 9, the prayer that we read earlier echoes this pessimistic history:

Nehemiah the governor and Ezra the scribe have gathered all Israel together
for the reading of the Law on the first day of the seventh month.
And as they listen to the law, they realize that they are supposed to celebrate a feast
later that month,
and so they gather again for the feast of Booths in the seventh month.
And so on the 24th day of the 7th month (the eighth day of the feast of booths)
they gathered together to confess their sins.

Their prayer follows the same basic pattern that we keep seeing:

*You are the LORD, you alone.
You have made the heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host,
the earth and all that is on it,
the seas and all that is in them;
and you preserve all of them;
and the host of heaven worships you.*

(Our Father in Heaven...)

*You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram
and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans
and gave him the name Abraham.
You found his heart faithful before you,
and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring
the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite,
the Jebusite, and the Girgashite.*

And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous.

(Hallowed be thy name...)

How do you know who God is?

Look at what he has done – in creation and in redemption.

And Israel's prayer recites the same history that we have just recounted,

from Egypt (v9-12) to Sinai (v13-15),
remembering the failure of Israel – how they acted presumptuously
and even made a golden calf [the great sin of Israel’s kings] (v16-18)
and yet God was merciful to them (v19-21)
and gave them the land (v22-25).
Yet they continued to rebel,
and verses 26-31 recounts the cycles of the judges and the kings.

*Nevertheless in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them,
for you are a gracious and merciful God.*

But then they come to the point:

*Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God,
who keeps covenant and steadfast love,
let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us,
upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers,
and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day.*

Listen, because Nehemiah will teach you how to pray,

“Give us this day our daily bread” in a way that avoids “give me what I want!”

*Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us,
for you have dealt faithfully, and we have acted wickedly.*

The first point is that when you are going to ask God for something,
don’t try the “you owe me” card.

It won’t work.

And more importantly, it’s not true.

All the bad things that have happened to us, we deserved!

But they go on to say in verse 36,

*Behold, we are slaves this day;
in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts,
behold, we are slaves.
And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins.
They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please,
and we are in great distress.*

But the real key to this prayer is found in chapter 10!

They covenant together to do what God says.

They understand that their fathers continued to sin because of their cravings.

And so they covenant together to do what God says!

They even “enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s law that was given by Moses”
and they obligate themselves to do what God had said in his law.

What was the point of this?

God had already established his covenant with them.

They were already obligated by *him* to do these things!

But sometimes it can be useful to take a vow or oath
to do what you are already bound to do!

After all, when Jesus says, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,
and all these things [food and clothing] will be added to you,”
there is a sense in which this is only true if we pray *Our Father*.

Apart from the church – apart from the body of Christ living as a body –
I’m not sure how this works!

Seeking first the kingdom of God is not an individual quest.

It is the quest of the church.

Obviously, each individual in the church must be committed to this –
this is evident from the names listed in 10:1-27 –
but if the church is in rebellion against God,
then we may not have sufficient food and clothing.

There are Christians who have starved to death!

But I daresay that if the whole church
ever actually sought first the Kingdom of God
in the way that Jesus commands,
then no Christian would ever starve.

But Nehemiah 9 never really gets to the final solution.

For that we need to go back to Psalm 78.

5) In the fifth central stanza of Psalm 78 (verses 56-66)

verse 59 says that God “utterly rejected Israel.”

Did he?

This is the point of the book of Samuel.

The point of the book of Samuel is that God has rejected Israel,
and the only way that God can redeem Israel is through a king –
a king who will succeed where Israel has failed.

And so God “forsook his dwelling at Shiloh, the tent where he dwelt among mankind,
and delivered his power to captivity, his glory to the hand of the foe.”

This is what happened in the days of Eli the priest
when the ark of the covenant was captured (1 Samuel 4).

The Philistines attacked,
and in the words of verse 64,
Their priests fell by the sword, and their widows made no lamentation.

Hophni and Phineas, the two sons of Eli, died in battle,
Eli, their father, fell over and died as soon as he heard the news,
and Phineas' wife made no lamentation,
because she died in childbirth that same day,
naming the child "Ichabod" because the glory had departed from Israel.

But it was precisely in the death of the priests, and in the capture of the ark,
that God began to move.

*Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, like a strong man shouting because of wine.
And he put his adversaries to rout; he put them to everlasting shame.*

The ark of the covenant went to the temple of Dagon – the god of the Philistines.
But in the very moment of his ultimate humiliation,
Yahweh revealed his glory!
Yahweh went alone into the temple of Dagon, the place of Dagon's power,
and Dagon fell down before the ark of the LORD.

Indeed, 1 Samuel 5 is the first turning point in the book of Samuel.

You know, of course, that your odds of success are best
when the LORD himself goes alone into battle for his people!

Because only then are we not able to screw things up!

And yet God is his steadfast love and abundant mercy,
continues to call weak and helpless men into his service.

*Yes, He rejected the tent of Joseph; he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim,
but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loves.
He built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has founded forever.*

(In light of our Genesis series, I cannot help but point out the parallel
between the sanctuary – the temple –
and the "high heavens" – God's heavenly dwelling place.)

*He chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds;
from following the nursing ewes he brought him to shepherd Jacob his people,
Israel his inheritance.*

You might expect Asaph to continue with reflections on the failure of the house of David.

But the point of Psalm 78 is not merely one of doom and gloom.
There is hope in the end!

With upright heart he shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand.

David was a good and faithful king – a shepherd who cared for the flock skillfully.
Salvation comes to Israel not only through God’s sovereign act,
but also through the man of God’s choosing.

So, the summary of all this is that your only hope is Jesus,
who is both the God who goes alone into the jaws of death,
and the man of God’s choosing who shepherds his chosen flock.

But because Jesus has established his church,
therefore when you pray “give us this day our daily bread,”
you are submitting to what *God* thinks you need.
You are subduing your cravings,
disciplining your appetites,
and putting to death the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes and the pride of life
and you are asking God to provide what you need.

And you are doing this *together*.

So let me ask you:

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