

The Prayer of Dependence

Sterling UMC
February 20, 2011
Matthew 6:9-13 (CEV)

How many of you enjoy eating? Every hand is raised because of course, we all do! Satisfying our taste buds is one of the great pleasures in life. And because it is, eating is always a great topic of conversation. Everyone loves to talk about food! In fact, if you ever find yourself in a room full of strangers one sure way to break the ice and get people talking is to mention food. I guess you might say that many of us are 'heavy weights' in this area. Whenever you bring up the subject of food, you're sure to get a mouthful.

Some people have gone so far as to memorialize their particular eating methods in poetry, like the man who said:

I eat my peas with honey.
I've done it all my life.
It makes them taste kind of funny.
But it keeps them on my knife!

I could keep "serving up" tales about food all day.

This brings us to our text this morning, which is the third phrase in our series on the Lord's Prayer, verse 11 of Matthew 6, where Jesus uses the popular subject of food to teach His listeners some very important principles.

Jesus says, "This then is how you should pray, 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'" And then our text for today: Give us today our daily bread

Now, the ears of the people listening as Jesus spoke these words would have perked up at this point, and not just because they loved to eat as much as we do, but also because they came from a culture that had a great deal of history when it came to depending on God for their daily bread. So when Jesus said this, I'm sure their Jewish heritage gave them all a mental flashback back to the days when God delivered their ancestors out of bondage in Egypt and eventually carried them all the way to the Promised Land.

You all know the story. There are the plagues, the cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night, and the parting of the Red Sea. And after seeing all the miraculous signs and wonders God used to accomplish their escape, after experiencing God's provision and protection and deliverance, you would think these people would be willing to follow God anywhere. But, no, just like you and me they were very forgetful when it came to remembering God's great faithfulness. And in Exodus 16:3 we find them actually complaining to Moses. They said,

"If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate food, all the food that we wanted, but you've brought us into this desert to starve to death!"

In verse 4 the Lord responded to their faithless complaining by saying,

"I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow My instructions."

And what happened? Just as God promised, "there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost appeared on the ground." They called this stuff "manna." Every day God sent them this bread from Heaven, and on the day before the Sabbath He told them to gather enough for two days so they wouldn't have to work on that day that was to be set aside for rest and worship. If they ever gathered more than their daily needs the leftovers would spoil. So they learned to literally trust God every day to provide. And He did indeed provide. God sent them their daily bread according to this plan for 40 years.

So they ate manna three times a day, seven days a week for forty years. Can you imagine that? I'm sure they got very creative in how they prepared this bread from Heaven. I mean how many ways can you fix manna? Really! Imagine the manna cookbooks that came out.

Mom, what are we having for breakfast? Manna omelets.
What are we having for lunch? Manna stew.
What are we having for dinner? Manicotti.

Seriously, my point is that because of their history I'm sure when they heard Jesus tell them they should learn to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," they remembered that their Heavenly Father had done this day after day for 40 years as He provided for the needs of His people.

With this historical context in mind, I think that is important for us to realize Jesus when he says we're to pray "*Give us this day our daily bread,*" he's talking about far more than just bread; he's talking about far more than just food. In fact, in scripture the Bible tells us that bread represents four things.

1. It represents the necessities of life.

You need water to live, you need air to live, you need sunshine to live, you need nourishment to live. It's the necessities for your physical body. The truth is God says I never create anything without providing what that creation needs.

Psalm 104 says this "*The ocean teems with life of every kind both great and small. [Big whales, little minnows] Every one of these depend on you to give them daily food. You supply it and they gather it.*"

This is the economy of God. God says I supply it. You gather it. So bread first of all represents the necessities of life. What you need for physical life.

But there's more than that. There's a spiritual implication.

2. Bread represents God's word.

The Bible is spiritual bread. It is spiritual food. Bread is a symbol for scripture. Jesus said, "*Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the*

mouth of God.” People need more than bread for their life. Real life comes by feeding on every word of the Lord. So God says you don’t just need physical nourishment, you need spiritual nourishment. Just as much as you need physical food for your body, you need soul food for your soul. You need spiritual food. You need the word of God. You need truth in your life in order to live.

3. The third thing that bread represents is it represents God’s family and fellowship.

You don’t just have spiritual needs and physical needs – you have relational needs. You need people in your life. And bread is a metaphor for the church; for the family of God. God says, *“Man shall not live by bread alone.”* And he also said, *“It’s not good for man to be alone.”* He said, I want you to have people in your life and that’s why God created a family called the church.

You’ve heard the phrase “breaking bread together.” It is a synonym for fellowship. The Bible says this, *“The bread which we break does it not mean that in eating it together we participate in and share in the fellowship of the body of Christ.”* We participate in and share in the fellowship in the body of Christ, in the family of God.

So bread represents the necessities of life, it represents the word of God, it represents the family of God, the church and fellowship for physical and spiritual and relational needs, and...

4. The fourth thing it represents is salvation.

Our salvation in Christ. At his Last Supper Jesus chose bread to represent his sacrifice in communion. And that night as he gathered with his disciples in the upper room, *“Jesus took a piece of bread and he gave thanks to God and he broke it and he gave it to them and he said ‘This is my body which is given for you. Do this in memory of me.’”*

Before he died he said I’m going to give you two symbols that you’re never to forget. I want you to, every time you eat this bread and drink this wine it is to remind you how much I love you and the sacrifice I made to give you, forgiveness, salvation and eternal life.

Here’s the point. Whatever your need is – physical, emotional, relational, spiritual – whether it is a need in your body or a need in your mind or a need in your soul or a need in your spirit, God says I will take care of that need if you will depend on me. *“Give us this day our daily bread.”* It is the Prayer of Dependence. All that I need – physically, spiritually, emotionally, relationally, financially and every other way, I depend upon God to supply.

What does it mean to pray this Prayer of Dependence? How do I let God meet my needs? What does it mean to depend on God?

It means three things.

1. Depending on God means seeing God as my source.

That's the first step. Seeing God as my source. The source of what? Literally the source of everything. Everything you have is from God as the source. It's all a gift from God.

The Bible tells us in the book of James, *"Every good and perfect gift is from God above."* That's why the Lord's Prayer in this third phrase starts with the word "give." *"Give us today our daily bread."* Why? Because it is a gift. You can't earn it. It's all a gift.

That means then there's nothing I need that God can't provide. There's nothing I need that God can't supply. The Bible says it like this in Philippians 4:19, *"God will supply all that you ever need from his glorious resources in Christ Jesus."* No matter what you need in your life, God wants to give it to you.

Matthew 7:11 says this, *"If you were asked by your son for bread, would you give him a stone? [The answer obviously is, of course not.] How much more likely is it that your heavenly Father will give good things to those who ask him?"* If my boys come to me and say, "Dad, I'm hungry!" What am I going to do? Give them a piece of rubber to chew on? No. I'm going to get them some food. And if I know how to do this and I'm imperfect certainly God who is perfect in his love toward you, wants to meet all your needs.

So here's my very blunt question: who's your source? For your safety, for your security, for your financial stability, who's your source? Washington? I hope not. Wall Street? Again, I hope not. Your job? All you have to do is look at the unemployment numbers to see this is not a source of security. I would not put your trust in your job. You need to look to God as your source.

Who are you looking to, to meet your needs?

No man will ever be able to meet all your needs. No woman will ever be able to meet all your needs. Your parents can't meet all your needs. Your spouse can't meet all your needs. Your girlfriend/boyfriend can't meet all your needs. In fact, if you think so you're setting yourself up for profound disappointment.

Only God can meet all your needs. And you need to look to him as the source of your supply. That's what it means to depend on God. I see him as my source.

2. The second thing it means to depend on God is it means trusting him for today.

Notice this Prayer of Dependence does not say, "Give us our monthly bread." It doesn't say, "Give us our weekly bread." It says, "Give us today our daily bread." God says I want you to depend on me one day at a time. I'm asking you to trust me for the rest of your life. Just in one twenty-four hour increment at a time. We'll worry about tomorrow, tomorrow. We'll worry about next week, next week. We'll worry about next month, next month. I don't want you worrying about that. In fact, I don't want you worrying at all. I want you to take it one day at a time.

How do you do that? How do you trust God just for today? We find the answer in this verse, Philippians 4:6-7, "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything.

Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."

Did you hear what that says? Three things:

1. Worry about nothing. Do you realize that every time you worry you're saying, "God, I don't believe your promises. God, I don't really believe you love me. God, I don't believe you'll take care of me. God, I don't believe you'll meet all my needs. Father, I don't believe that you're going to take care of me and do all the things you promised to do." It is an insult to God.

2. Pray about everything. Worry about nothing, pray about everything. Worry has never solved a problem. But prayer can change things. If you prayed as much as you worried, you'd have a lot less to worry about.

3. Thank God in all things. No matter what happens – in all things he says give thanks. Notice, it doesn't say, "For all things give thanks." It says "In all things give thanks." You don't have to be thankful for bad things in your life. You should never be thankful for evil. You don't have to be thankful for cancer or a car accident or war or abuse or any of those other bad things in life. But God says *in* everything give thanks. Why? Because I know that God's going to take care of me. I know he's going to meet my needs. I know he's going to help me. I know that if I don't worry but I trust him, I see him as my source and I trust him one day at a time, he's going to take me through this. So I thank God in all things.

There's a third key to depending on God. I see him as my source; I trust him one day at a time. The third thing....

3. I share whatever he supplies.

Trusting God, depending on God, means sharing whatever he supplies. When God gives you something he always wants you to share it with everybody else. Everything God gives to you, he wants you to share it. Remember, Jesus didn't say we should pray, "*Give me this day my daily bread,*" but rather, "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" And He worded it like this as a way of helping us to broaden our focus to include the needs of others.

Why does God want you to share it? Because he wants you to learn to be like him. God shares everything he's got with you. God is generous. God so loved the world that he gave. You can give without loving. But you cannot love without giving. God says I want you to become like me. I want you to be loving and I want you to learn how to share.

Friends there are so many people in this world that are desperately seeking something to satisfy their hunger. They crave something to fill them up. There is an empty place within their hearts, in the depths of their souls that they have tried to fill with everything from money and power, to entertainment and pleasure, to drugs and alcohol. And nothing works. So they become desperate and don't know where to turn. Maybe you're even sitting here this morning feeling that way right now.

If you are then hear my message, hear this good news. There is one who can make you truly happy. There is one who will satisfy your deepest longings. There is one who will sustain you when things don't seem to work out. There is one who will strengthen you when you feel you can't go on. There is one who will give your life real meaning and purpose. There is one who will feed your soul. His name is Jesus, and he says to all who will receive him, "I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who comes to me will never be thirsty." And friends, he offers you more than just bread. He offers you life. He offers you strength. He offers you himself. You can depend on Him.

Lord, Give us this day and everyday our daily bread.