

“THE PRAYER OF JESUS #3: GIVE US THIS DAY”

(Matthew 6:7-13)

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[PROP NEEDED: (1) SermonSpice Video; (2) PPT Slide of Verse 11]

[LaGrange First U.M.C.; 3-4-18]

--I--

1. **Responsive Reading** of C.E.B. version of Matthew 6:7-13 (Brian reads Verses 7-9a; Congregation joins reading Verses 9a-13, starting with "*Our Father...*"). Pray.

2. We're in the midst of a series called "The Prayer of Jesus" in which we're exploring the meaning and value of each phrase of "*The Lord's Prayer*," which Jesus shared to be a *pattern/skeleton* around which we develop our *own* personal and corporate prayers.

A--In previous weeks, I've shared the fact that the first three petitions of this prayer (in Verses 9-10) focus on the identity, nature, and character of *God*. ...

B--...And that then (and only then) does it begin to address *our needs* as humans -- telling us (by its very order) that prayer should always *start* with *God*, rather than with us.

C--But, of course, it *does* eventually *get* to us. Which is why, today, our attention turns to the first petition that actually does that: Verse 11. Say it with me, if you will:
[ON SCREEN]... "*Give us this day our daily bread.*"

3. Now, what exactly does that mean? And what is its relevance in our lives and world today? Well, to answer that, let's first watch a short video of what I'm sure that it *doesn't* mean...
[WATCH VIDEO "*Thoughts on Daily Bread*" (from SermonSpice.com, Time 0:51)]

A--I hope its obvious, but when Jesus first shared this prayer, he wasn't thinking *only* about *literal* bread, but had something much more essential in mind.

B--And to understand what I'm talking about, let's look this verse in detail.

--II--

4. It begins with the words "**GIVE US...**"

A--Now, I sometimes hear Christians who seem to think that it's selfish to ask God for things -- as if God is too busy, or too holy, or too (whatever) to have time or inclination to provide for imperfect, unholy creatures like us! How dare we ask God to "*give*" us anything!

1--But if anything, this phrase invites us -- *after* we pray for the will of *God* -- to boldly bring *our* cares/needs before Him ("***Give...***").

2--These aren't words of timidity (or even of arrogance or presumption) but of boldness and confidence that come from the knowledge that God is "*Our Father/Daddy in heaven*" who wants only the very *best* for us! ¹

3--These words tell of a God who is *not* a crusty old curmudgeon who answers prayer by grudgingly doling out the bare minimum, but you a loving Father who *yearns* to lavish His children with things that will help them thrive in His love.

B--Notice here also, though, the all-important words "**us**" and "**our**." Jesus didn't say "*Give me... my daily bread*," but "*Give us... our daily bread*" -- again reminding us of the *corporate* nature even of prayers for ourselves.

1--You know, most of already know that global farming produces enough food to feed every mouth in our world today. And yet, people still go hungry. Why?

2--Well, it's not a lack of *supply*, but of proper *distribution* -- not enough of us *share* what *we* have, and so others *starve*.

3--Perhaps that's why the founder of Methodism John Wesley taught three rules for Christians to follow regarding money: "*Earn all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can*" -- in other words, the antidote to human selfishness is *generosity*.

C--One of the things Trish and I (and perhaps many of you) have always had a custom of doing is helping other who have special financial needs.

1--Maybe it's a family going through a rough patch, a hard-luck individual who needs business thrown their way, or a faith-organization that we feel passionate about.

2--Whoever or whatever it is, though, after we give our tithe (the *first* 10% of our gross income) to our church's budget, we give *above* our tithe for things like this. ²

3--And we do this because we believe that to pray "*give us*" is a request *not only* for God to provide *us* what *we* need, but that *we* would be used to help provide for the needs of *others* -- this prayer is a prayer for us to receive bounty *from* God, but its also an invitation and calling for us then to *share it* with others, as well!

5. So, what about the phrase "**...THIS DAY OUR DAILY...**"? To what does that refer?

A--Well, scholars have long debated the meaning of the word we translate as "**Daily**" (*epi-ousion*) -- this verse is the *only* place it appears in the entire Bible, & it's even only found in *one* other ancient manuscript, where it references a "shopping list." ³

1--So, while it could mean provision that is (literally) "*day by day*" (e.g., one day at a time, and no more),...

2--It could *also* mean provision that is "essential and necessary" (i.e., "what's required for survival, not what's desired for luxury"). ⁴

B--But either way, this is, quite simply, an invitation to trust & rely on God's timely supply.

1--Remember the story (Exodus 16) of God providing the Hebrews in the desert with a daily food to eat called "*manna*," but that when they tried to store it, it went bad? -- they had to learn to trust God for what they needed *daily*.

2--Well, following God is the same for us today: ...we have to learn not to get so worked up about what "might" happen (or even what "is" happening) in our lives or in the world around us, but to trust God *daily*. ⁵

3--Don't be anxious about what's happening in the government, or with our job, or our 401K, the stock market, or to our savings account -- as we've seen over the last few years, these can all disappear overnight! Instead, trust God *daily*.

4--A Jewish Rabbi once said: "*One who possesses what they can eat today and yet says 'What shall I eat tomorrow?' is a person of little faith.*" ⁶

C--Now, does this mean we shouldn't "save for a rainy day" or make plans for the future?

1--Absolutely not! But in doing so, we should beware of thinking that the accumulation of *things* will make us happy/content -- they won't; they'll just make us want *more*!

2--And as for making plans for the future? Well, we don't need to be so obsessed with the future that we can't live in the present!

3--And that's why we're taught here to live trusting God "one day at a time" for what we need, & *not* be worried/anxious about the future, like so many people are today. ⁷

6. Finally, what *about* this word "**BREAD**." Besides literally, what *more* does it mean?

A--Well, remember I said earlier that the "hard-to-translate" word *epi-ousion* ("*daily*") could mean both "*day by day*" and "*essential*"? Well, a third way to translate is... "*...that which sustains our fundamental existence.*"

B--If so, then the "*bread*" that Jesus is speaking of here is obviously much more than literal food (as proposed in the silly video we saw earlier).

C--Now, there are several suggestions as to what this metaphorical meaning might refer:

1--Some say it's a reference to the future Messianic Feast of Heaven (Rev. 19), with the bread of Holy Communion as a present day symbol of that. ⁸

2--Others say that the "bread" Jesus is speaking of is a reference to Holy Scripture (i.e., the Bible/ the Word of God, often called the "bread of life").⁹

D--And yet, scripture itself is clear that the ultimate "bread of life" ... is Jesus *himself*-- *HE*, more than anyone or anything else, is "*that which sustains our fundamental existence.*"

1--How does Jesus put it in John 6:35?... "*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*"

2--So, instead of being a request for our *own* needs (important though those are), perhaps Verse 11 should really be read... "*Lord Jesus, each and every day, give us yourself, so that we might have the strength and courage to face life unafraid.*"

3--And after all, isn't that what we all need? ...Strength and courage to face the frustrations and challenges that life throws at us? And isn't the only way we can face these unafraid is if our souls and spirits are being nourished by the daily presence of Jesus Christ?

--III--

7. And I think *that's* the bottom line for this whole verse, and it therefore leads me to ask the question: ***In your spiritual life, are you well-fed or malnourished?***

A--Does Jesus (the "bread of life") live within you? And are you allowing him to "feed" your spirit on a daily basis? (*not* just once/week at church, but daily... through prayer? Bible reading? fellowship with other Believers?)

B--You see, there's a lot of us who may say "The Lord's Prayer" on a regular basis, but inside, our spirits are starving because we're trying to live life out of our own strength, instead of allowing the "bread of life" (Jesus) to nourish us.

8. And so, today God wants all of us to pray, "*Give us this day our daily bread*" -- seven simple words that express the sufficiency of God's provision for all aspects of our lives.

A--Yes, it's okay -- once we've given God *His* proper place -- for us to pray for our own wants and needs in life (God yearns to do that for each of us).

B--But even more than that, he yearns for each of us to seek a relationship with Him through his son Jesus -- that we would pray "*Lord, give us this day and every day the daily bread that is Jesus, without whom our lives and spirits starve!*"

C--May *his* presence be the "daily bread" that we each seek after every day of our lives!

9. [PRAYER -- Include invitation for those who do not yet know the "bread of life" to invite him into their hearts...]

ENDNOTES:

¹ Several other places in scripture mirror this boldness in making requests of God. For example: John 15:7 "*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you*"; Mark 11:24, "*I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours*"; Hebrews 4:16, "*Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*"

Also notice that even these human requests in Verses 11-13 are essentially still nothing more than prayer for self-surrender to God: We ask for bread for the *present*; forgiveness for things in the *past*; strength/endurance through tribulation to come in the *future*. In other words, the last three petitions teach us to lay our past, present, and future before the footstool of God.

² The way Trish and I see it, if we've been blessed with extra finances, then part of our responsibility is to give some of that excess away to help others, too.

³ The word we translate into English as "daily" is the Greek word *epi-ousion* (ἐπιουσιον).

⁴ "*The Lord's Prayer*" article in The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible.

⁵ For other scriptures that parallel this thought, read Philippians 4:6 and Matthew 6:34.

⁶ The words to a famous hymn say it well... "*Be not dismayed whate'er betide, God Will Take Care of You; Beneath His wings of love abide, God Will Take Care of You; God will take care of you, through every day, o'er all the way. He will take care of you, God will take care of you*" ("*God Will Take Care of You*," lyrics by Civilla D. Martin, found in The United Methodist Hymnal #130). Notice that the prayer does not say, "*Give me adequate bread,*" or "*Never let me run out of bread.*" The emphasis is on "daily bread" (i.e., enough for the day at hand, and that day only). The clear message is that we are to renew our relationship and our trust in God every day. While times of anxiety will continue to occur for all of us, excessive worry separates us from God by focusing our energy on the problem instead of focusing on God. The principle of "daily bread" is about seeking and trusting God anew every day.

⁷ Referring to this phrase, Drew Haninger once said, "*This is an acknowledgement that God is our source. We shouldn't look to government. We should not necessarily look to our jobs for what we need. We need to look to God and realize that God is behind government. God is behind the resources in our country and even behind what kind of work we have. This prayer is an acknowledgement that God must provide what we need today and every day*" (Taken from a Cable TV broadcast called In the Beginning by Drew Haninger, Message #TV0023, found at www.DrewHaninger.com).

⁸ After all, from the earliest days of the Church, "The Lord's Prayer" was prayed as part of the ritual of Holy Communion, and hence Verse 11 may simply be a prayer asking for the privilege of receiving the Holy Communion elements.

⁹ One of our ancient hymns puts it this way: "*Break Thou the bread of life, Dear Lord, to me; As Thou didst break the loaves beside the sea. Beyond the sacred page I seek thee, Lord. My spirit pants for Thee, O living Word*" ("*Break Thou The Bread of Life*", lyrics by Mary A. Lathbury, #599 in The United Methodist Hymnal).