

“The Lord’s Prayer: Daily Bread”
 Luke 11:1-4; 12:22-34

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Scripture: Luke 11:1-4; 12:22-34

Sermon:

Introduction...

[pic] Imagine taking your family to somebody’s house for dinner. When the meal is about to begin, your family looks around at who will say grace or if grace will be said at all. Your host says, “If you want to thank somebody for the food, thank me, not God!” Can you imagine that?!? Crazy, right?

Well, that happened to friends of mine! They went to their sister’s house and her husband, an atheist, said that exact thing when the kids wanted to pray before they ate. So much for letting people believe what they want, right?

But it’s easy to think that what we have, what we have purchased ourselves, is something we’ve earned. We may not be so crass as to object to somebody praying before a meal, but we still think of our stuff as “ours” and that “we earned it.”

Let me ask you, though, did you choose the gifts and abilities you have by which you earn your wage? [pic] Did you found, fund or otherwise create, build or contribute to each school that you attended growing up? Maybe you paid tuition at some point along the way, but did you found that school?

[pic] Did you create the Canadian economic system that provides you a job? Did you create the Canadian social system that allows you to own property, and your boss to own the company you work for, and prevents it from being arbitrarily seized by the government or a king?

[pic] Have you personally shielded Canada from the destruction and havoc caused by war on its own soil for the past 200 years? All of these things form the background and foundation for you to be working today and earning the money you have. Yet you contributed nothing to them. Did you really “earn” everything you have?

If you think I’m belabouring the point, consider the people of Syria who have been forced from their homes by ISIS. They were hard workers, minding their own business, earning their wages, and then war came and took it all away. Or consider the people of Greece during their recent economic difficulties as a nation. Individual workers had little or nothing to do with their entire country’s economic collapse, but they were certainly affected by it! Or consider the countless examples of countries in the 20th Century which became communist. Their new communist governments “nationalized” all the companies, taking away people’s businesses, factories, trucks, equipment etc. Throughout much of history, if a king or local lord saw something he liked, if he saw somebody with a thriving business or trade of some kind, he had the power to just take it from them. A key part of the Capitalist system is the foundational belief, unstated most of the time, that people have the right to hold property and it cannot be taken away from them arbitrarily without compensation. The fact that you own your stuff and own it securely is something not to be taken for granted!

Did you really “earn” everything you have? Did you really “earn” what you eat, what you wear and what you own all by yourself? Or do you owe some other people thanks for the work they did in years past, or even continue to do today?

Text

Today we are continuing our look at the Lord’s Prayer. We have come to the middle of the prayer, the request for daily bread. In the West we can quickly lose sight of God’s provision of our basic physical needs because we have so much! We can also become consumed with having more stuff to consume.

Please turn with me to Luke 11:1-4 and then to Luke 12:22-34.

What It Says

Let’s take a look at what these two passages say before we start drawing some lessons from them. First, in the Lord’s Prayer, notice that it is only after the question of God’s nature being made known (his name) and his kingdom or rule coming that Jesus models for us coming to our own requests and needs. “With God’s character and authority established, Jesus turns to the matter of requests.” [Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, p. 204] Remember, God’s name we looked at the first week. God’s name means his character, in particular his saving work! God’s

kingdom, as we have talked about a number of times, is God's authority to rule. When we have situated ourselves as God's children coming to a loving Father, having set our priorities on God's character being reflected in our lives and honoured in our world, and having asked for his rule in our lives and in the world, then and only then do we ask that, within the bounds of his glory and authority, that he provide for our needs.

Notice, as well, just like the opening line of the prayer, we are speaking in the plural, "Our Father... our daily bread." This is not just the prayer of the individual for the individual but prayer for the whole Christian community. **You may have your daily bread already, but in this model prayer we are taught to also pray that God would provide bread for others too.** The Lord's Prayer reminds us that we are a Christian community. We are all the body of Christ together. When we pray, we are praying for our brothers and sisters in Christ too.

So what is it we are asking for when we ask for "daily bread." Are we merely asking for simple bread? Or just food? Or more? "Bread symbolizes all that we eat." [Kenneth Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, p. 119] In the West we speak of bread. In much of the East they would speak of rice. A Chinese classmate of mine in seminary said that in the Chinese translation of the Bible he had this line of the Lord's Prayer was translated, "Give us this day our daily rice" because the Chinese don't eat bread and wouldn't know what that meant! Daily bread points to all that we need. It need not even be limited to food. Daily bread points to all our physical needs including clothes and shelter. [Darrel Johnson, *Fifty-Seven Words that Change the World*, p. 70] **When we consider that "daily bread" symbolizes all that we have and need, and we are taught to ask God for daily bread every day, we are reminded that all we have is from God!** [Thomas Watson, *The Lord's Prayer*, p. 195]

Jesus understood that our material needs are important. He understood, too, that we are easily consumed by these needs, that they can become the focus of our attention and efforts. Throughout his teaching, Jesus said a lot about material goods, wealth, money and physical needs. Later, in Chapter 12, he speaks of these things quite a bit. Just before the passage we read, Luke records Jesus' parable of the rich fool. He did very well financially and spent all the money on himself. He made a plan to build bigger barns to hold all his wealth so that he could "retire" and live easily the rest of his life. He is called a fool, though, because God tells him that very night he will die. The rich fool has used all of his wealth, all of his money, for himself. He hasn't used any of it for the glory of God. He hasn't spent any of it on other people. For all his wealth, he wasn't able to add one day to his life! So even though he was rich, he was still going to die and his wealth was going to be rendered useless.

Given the context of the parable of the rich fool, consider again what Jesus said in our second passage, Luke 12:22-34. Jesus isn't just saying "don't worry." He is saying not to be consumed with material things. He goes on to give a couple examples of the way God cares for his creatures and makes the point that we, created in God's image, are so much more important than the rest of creation! First, Jesus uses the example of ravens who neither sow nor reap nor store food in barns, and yet God feeds them. It is interesting to note that **ravens were unclean according to Jewish religious law.** (Lev. 11:15) [Leon Morris, *Luke*, p. 234; Bock, p. 227] So not only is Jesus pointing to mere birds, but to unclean birds! Even the unclean parts of God's creation, those things that served as a reminder of God's holiness and humanity's sin are still valuable enough to God that he cares for them!

Jesus second example is that of grass, clothed with lilies. If grass, which is of little value and cheaply destroyed, is something God clothes with splendour, then do you really need to worry about what you're going to wear? God will provide what you need! God is our loving Father, who loves to give to his children that which they need.

In between these two examples taken from nature, Jesus points out that worry is actually pointless. [Bock, p. 227] We're not sure exactly the image Jesus uses, either that nobody, through worry, can add to their height or to the length of their life. Either way, the point is clear. Worry is pointless! It doesn't do anything to address your needs. **In Scripture, worry is the opposite of trust.** [Bock, p. 228] The implication is that when we are worrying about things, it demonstrates that we are not trusting God.

Jesus says that we are not to "set our heart" on these things, such as food and drink, but also our material needs and possessions. Remember what "heart" means in the Bible. It is not just our feelings, but our mind, will, desires and imagination too. We are not to set our desires on these things. We are not to allow these things to fill or consume our imagination, always dreaming of what it would be like to have this or that. We are not to set our

goals on these things, or to brood on whether or not we have them, or to let them consume our thinking or take over our priorities! Jesus says it is the “pagans” who run after these things, who pursue them.

Twice in this passage Jesus refers to God as our Father. This is a reminder that God is looking after us. He is eager to provide for our needs if we come to him and humbly ask and also allow him to determine what we actually need.

Twice, as well, Jesus speaks of the Kingdom. Without going over it again, remember the diagram we had last week and earlier in the summer. God’s kingdom means God’s rule. It is also referred to as the Age to Come and is a contrast with this present age of darkness and sin. In verse 31 Jesus says to seek first the kingdom [of God] and in verse 32 he comforts us that God has been pleased to give us his kingdom. So **Jesus is saying we are to seek first, to make our top priority, God’s rule and authority in our lives and in the world around us.** God is eager to grant this request! In light of having God’s rule in our lives, we can hold loosely to our possessions, giving away what we can to meet the needs of others, seeing all that we have as something to glorify God with. This is just like the Lord’s Prayer in which we ask for God’s will to be done, or as Matthew includes, God’s kingdom to come. It’s all linked together!

And when we make God’s rule in our lives our top priority, God provides the other things we need. He may not always provide what we want. There’s no guarantee we will wear Gucci sunglasses or drive BMWs. God provides what we need as he determines it! But he provides for our needs. And when God’s rule and authority in our lives is our top priority, when that dominates our imagination, our desires, our thinking and our will, we find that we don’t need nearly as much as we once thought.

Lessons to Take With Us

The first lesson I want to articulate comes from this last point in Luke 12. **The Kingdom of God has different priorities and attitudes than the Kingdom of This World.** Jesus says that it is the pagans who run after material gain. It is the citizens of this age that are consumed with these things, who set their hearts on these things. By contrast, God’s people, citizens of God’s kingdom, those for whom God is Father through Jesus Christ, are to have different priorities in life and their attitude towards material possessions, food, clothing, and the like, is to be different.

In the Kingdom of God, people see that God have given them the abilities by which they earn money for food, clothing and shelter. They see that God has provided all they have. Perhaps God has used secondary means, such as an education and a job, but they recognize and give credit to God for providing these things.

If you recall our first sermon on the Lord’s prayer, speaking of God’s name and nature, we talked about the fact that one of the ways God demonstrates his nature is in his saving work. That is one of the most profound aspects of God’s nature. That same nature of God is at play here too. The God who saves is also the God who provides. And he doesn’t just provide for his people. God even provides for his enemies! [Watson, p. 197] “God makes it rain on the righteous and the unrighteous alike,” Jesus said. (Matthew 5:45) Remember, rain in that region is incredibly important! Jesus wasn’t talking about rainy days as bad things. He was saying that God provides the rain for crops for people who are righteous, in a right relationship with God, and the unrighteous, those who are rebelling against God.

So one of the things that characterizes the difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this Age is that those in the kingdom of God give God credit for his provision while those in the kingdom of this Age do not. Another difference is that **those in the Kingdom of God see what they have been given in terms of how it can be used to glorify God.** We are to use the strength God has provided to glorify God and serve him. We are to use the money God has given us to glorify God and to serve his kingdom. We are to use the gifts and abilities God has given us to serve him and bring glory to his name. Those who do not have God’s rule in their lives see what they have been given, strength, money, gifts and abilities, in terms of how it can serve them.

Jesus teaching counters two worldly views about money: worry about money and the pursuit of wealth. Or, to put it another way, worry and greed. “Greed can never get enough, worry is afraid it may not have enough.” [Morris, p. 233] Both attitudes reflect a lack of trust in God and submission to God’s authority. Anxiety about wealth is pointless and, in fact, pagan. “It may be an insidious threat to the disciples’ loyalty.” [Caird, p. 163] When you worry about what you will eat or wear, it distracts you from the rule of God. Whether you are worried about having enough or greedy to want more, the pursuit of wealth is dangerous. Both lead to

the pursuit of wealth. Both worry and greed cause us to set our hearts on things of this world not God's kingdom.

This problem is nothing new. The book of Proverbs speaks of this too. Proverbs 30:8-9 reads, "**Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need, or I shall be full, and deny you, and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or I shall be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God.**" This is a prayer that God would provide exactly what is needed, neither more nor less. Why? Because if God's gives too much, one is tempted to think they are self-sufficient and deny God, "Who is the Lord?" If one does not have enough, one is tempted to steal and thereby dishonour God's name and character. Or, another way to put it, greed makes us think we don't need God. Worry about not having enough makes us tempted to do things that will dishonour God.

So what, then, is the proper attitude towards money, wealth and material things? We certainly need food. We need shelter. We need clothes. What is Jesus trying to teach us? We are not to make these the things we seek. This does not exclude legitimate effort! [Morris, p. 235] This does excuse laziness or expecting a handout. God expects us to work. The difference is where we have set our heart, where we have set our goals, desires and priorities, what we spend our time fantasizing about or dreaming of.

Nor is Jesus calling us to a life of poverty. He is not suggesting we take a vow of poverty and give up all our worldly possessions. Nowhere does Jesus instruct that. In fact, there are numerous examples of people in the NT who were wealthy who didn't sell all they had. Rather, they used what they had to serve God. "Given God's care, we can be generous with the things God provides. The contrast between Jesus' attitude and that of the rich fool [in the parable he just told] could not be greater!" [Bock, p. 227] **The stress is on being unattached to our material possessions. The focus is not on giving up our possessions but on being generous with our resources.** [Bock, p. 229]

In the Kingdom of God, under God's rule and authority, we are to live a lifestyle of gratitude. When we have gratitude towards God for what he has provided, we are less likely to be consumed with greed, the desire for more. We will appreciate what we have, recognizing it comes from God, which helps us not to be anxious about our needs being met. Thanking God for what he have reminds us and reassures us he will continue to provide what we need. All that we have comes from God. All that we have is to be used to glorify God. This is the attitude that characterizes those living under God's authority.

Applying the Lessons

So how do we apply these lessons? How do we apply lessons of wealth? How do we apply this to our prayer lives? **The first lesson is to see that we are to pray daily.** This means we pray daily for God's name to be hallowed, for his will to be done and for our needs to be met. This is a daily activity, not a once in a while activity, not a Sunday activity, not a "I'm in need" activity. It is a daily activity. Remember, we may have our daily bread already, but many of our brothers and sisters in Christ, around the world and in our own congregation, do not have their daily bread. We must pray for God to provide for them too!

This prayer also teaches us to depend upon God for all our needs. God is concerned both with his name being glorified and our physical needs being met. These are both part of God's will being done, part of his rule coming and being established on earth. We must pray for God to continue to meet our needs and to sustain the means by which he meets them. Broadly speaking, we are praying for God to continue to sustain and uphold the system by which He provides our food, clothing and shelter, from the farmer who plants the seeds to the truckers who transport goods to the stores, from the employers who give us jobs to the politicians who make decisions about the economy, to the cashiers and stock boys who work in the stores where we get the food we eat and the clothes we wear. When we pray for God to provide our daily bread, we can think of and include all of these steps and that all of the people and systems involved in these steps come under God's rule and honour his character and name.

These are good steps towards developing the right attitude towards our material needs and possessions. **"But the real cure for worry is to put first things first, to care more about God's kingdom than about personal needs."** [Caird, p. 163] When we get our priorities right in this area, the other pieces fall into place. "Anyone's heart, the concentration of his energies and interests, is always with his treasure, ie. The things he values most." [Morris, p. 237] If you value God's kingdom, God's rule, most, then that is where you will focus your energy and interest. If you care for your own physical wants, needs and pleasure, then that is where you will

put your energy and concentration. The Lord's prayer demonstrates for us and helps us to put our focus on God's kingdom both by explicitly praying for it and by helping us develop a sense of gratitude to God for what we have and recognizing that what we have comes from him.

“The deepest dimension of life is relationship with God and with others.” [Bock, p. 227]

Relationships matter! Righteousness is a relationship word. Having a right relationship with God allows us to have a right relationship with money and stuff. Having a right relationship with God shapes our relationships with other people. This is the core of life. “Living is more than having; it is being in relationship with God and relating well to others.” [Bock, p. 227] That is the purpose of life! We must ask ourselves if we value people and therefore use our resources to serve them through giving, or do we value ourselves and our stuff and therefore hoard our resources and use them only for ourselves? [Bock, p. 229] Remember, agape love is about being primarily concerned with the well-being of others, in particular their spiritual well-being. Love is characterized by self-giving and generosity, by being other-centred.

This should shape how we ask God for things in prayer. When we pray for physical things, like food, clothing, shelter and the like, it should be with the goal of using these things for God's glory. That includes using them to feed ourselves to have the strength to serve him. When we pray, we should ask God to provide what we need, not necessarily what we want or what the world around us tells us we need. If we have too much we will be prideful and think we don't need God. If we have too little we will be tempted to cut corners or do other things dishonouring to God. Many times when we pray for material things we are praying merely for our own pleasures, not our needs or the needs of others or with the goal of glorifying God. **“We must have a higher purpose in our prayers; we must aim at heaven when we are praying for earth.”** [Watson, p. 199] This is what the Lord's Prayer teaches us when it says, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

In light of God being our Father, in light of our prayer that his character, his saving work be made known and seen as holy and set apart as special, in light of asking for his kingdom, his rule on earth and in our own hearts, we ask God to provide for our daily needs, not just for ourselves but for everybody, and we recognize in so doing that God has provided for us already all that we have. This orients us toward God. It is an act of repentance to turn our hearts away from the stuff our culture worships and put it under the authority of God. Amen.