

Teach Us to Pray: A Series Through the Lord's Prayer
Our Daily Bread (Matthew 6:11)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on July 10, 2016

Introduction

- ❖ As we've been going through our series in the Lord's Prayer, we've come to the second half of the prayer. **We've mentioned before how the first half contains three petitions that are distinctly Godward.** They focus on God – on God's name, God's kingdom, God's will. They're all about adoration. You're asking for things that have more to do with God than yourself. It's very strange. We don't typically pray this way. But this is how Jesus taught us to pray. **Our priority in prayer ought to be God's glory and not just our needs.**
 - ▶ But that's not to say that Jesus' ignores or downplays the importance of our needs. He goes on to teach us how to pray for ourselves. There are three more petitions. The Lord directs us to pray for daily bread, for forgiveness of sin, and for deliverance from evil. **In other words, pray for provision, pardon, and protection.**

- ❖ We all share these needs. There's not a single person alive who doesn't have these three needs. They're a part of who we are as creatures – as fallen, sinful creatures. The truth is: No man is an island – a self-sustained island. **We all need provision.** No one is perfect and free of sin. **We all need pardon.** And no one is so strong or resilient. **We all need protection.** So this second half of the Lord's Prayer is concerned with these creaturely needs.

- ❖ Now after praying for God's name to be hallowed, for his kingdom to come, and for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, **I understand if it seems abrupt and a bit out of place to suddenly shift to such creaturely needs. To ask for something as mundane as bread.** In fact, that was the consensus among the early church commentators. This fourth petition sounded so materialistic to these church fathers that they ended up allegorizing it.
 - ▶ They interpreted "daily bread" as really a reference to the Word of God, or it must symbolize the communion bread in the Lord's Supper. Jesus couldn't have been talking about real bread. That sounds too plain. Too simple.

- ❖ I agree this a simple petition, but I'd argue that it's complex with multiple layers. This morning my goal is to peel back some of those layers.
 - ▶ As we try to make a habit of praying "Give us this day our daily bread", I want to help you to think deeply about what you're asking. What exactly are you praying for? I have five points. Five layers within this one request.

A Prayer for the Seemingly Insignificant

- ❖ The first point just builds on what I've been saying. This is a prayer for the seemingly insignificant. Think about it. We're asking God – the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy (Isa. 57:15), the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tim. 6:15) – we're asking him for some bread. And he's the one telling us to!
 - ▶ Do you realize how crazy that is? **This as an invitation to bring God your requests no matter how small or insignificant you or others might consider them to be.** Apparently God cares about the day-to-day concerns of our ordinary lives.

- ❖ You'd think he'd be too busy running the universe. You'd think he'd have more important things to do than listen to your request for bread. And yet here he is instructing us to do just that. **It really speaks to the greatness of God that he is even concerned with something as basic as our physical daily needs.**
 - ▶ The gods of this world would be offended by this fourth petition. They'd be annoyed if bothered by such trivial matters. Do you remember in the book of Esther – how anyone who approaches the king of Persia without being summoned would immediately be put to death? That is, unless the king extends his golden scepter of mercy (Est. 4:11). **It's because the mighty king of such a mighty kingdom doesn't want to be bothered by insignificant petitioners and their insignificant requests.**
 - That's how the high and mighty of this world operate. They can't be bothered by us. But that's why it's almost unbelievable that the Highest and Mightiest of all would invite us to approach in prayer with the simplest of requests.
- ❖ And I hope you understand why God can be so inviting, considering how sinful and annoying we can be. **It's because someone else has already approached as a substitute and was put to death in our place.** It's because Jesus – the only one worthy to approach the Father by his own righteousness – has given his righteous life as a gift to those who trust him. **Because of Jesus, God's golden scepter of mercy remains forever extended towards you who believe.** That allows you to confidently approach God in prayer with the simplest of requests.
- ❖ Could it be that you've neglected to pray for certain things because you just assumed they're beneath God? That they're too insignificant to bother him with. But as **James 4:2** so bluntly puts it, "**You do not have, because you do not ask.**" Many of us have cut ourselves off from experiencing the power of God in prayer because of our own false assumptions about the Lord. It's about time we take his instructions seriously and pray for daily bread.

A Prayer for the Truly Necessary

- ❖ This is a prayer for the seemingly insignificant. Next, this is a prayer for the truly necessary. In ancient cultures, bread (or any grain like wheat or rice) was a fundamental staple of human existence. **You simply wouldn't survive without bread.** It was that essential.
 - ▶ But, in our day and age, that concept is often lost on us. Many of us have the luxury of giving up bread in our diet. We know people who are on a low carb diet or who suddenly discovered they're allergic to gluten. **But no one was gluten-free in the ancient world.** Everyone needed bread to live, to simply survive.
- ❖ When he was in the wilderness, Jesus didn't tell the devil off by saying man can live without bread. No, he said man cannot live by bread *alone* (Mt. 4:4). He was saying we need the Word of God, to live on the Word. The Bible is more important than bread. But if you want to physically live, you still need bread. There's no denying that.
 - ▶ **This just speaks to our creatureliness.** We are not the Creator. Unlike God, we do not have life in ourselves. We're not self-existing. We cannot sustain ourselves. We need sustenance. We need food and drink to survive.

- ❖ So in this petition we are asking for literal bread, for actual food. Of course, “give us our daily bread” means more than that – but certainly not less. **There's nothing unspiritual about praying for food and drink.** The reason we rarely do that is probably because we all have refrigerators that are full, and we can afford to eat out whenever we want. It's sobering to remember that many Christian brothers and sisters from around the world are praying this fourth petition with actual food in mind. That's a humbling thought.
 - ▶ But even if it's not food that we have in mind, **the heart of this request is a plea for God to provide for our most basic needs in life.** The Reformer **Martin Luther** says *daily bread* symbolizes, “*everything necessary for the preservation of this life, like food, a healthy body, good weather, house, home, wife, children, good government and peace.*” The **Westminster Shorter Catechism** speaks more generally when it states that in this fourth petition, “*we pray that, of God's free gift, we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life, and enjoy his blessing with them.*”
- ❖ There is nothing unspiritual or inherently selfish in asking God for the good things of this life. You can ask him for good health, to get you into that school, to get that job, to find yourself a spouse, to have a child, etc.
 - ▶ **But the challenge is determining whether these are part of the necessities of life or if they're luxuries.** The emphasis in this petition are on the necessities of life. I like how Kent Hughes wittily puts it, “[Jesus tells us] to pray for bread, not dessert!”
- ❖ **Are you praying for bread or for dessert? For necessities or luxuries?** It's hard to answer. It's subjective. What's necessary in life can change depending on your circumstances. What we'd consider necessary may be an expendable luxury for survivors on a life raft in the middle of the Pacific.
 - ▶ My point is that there's no list. **I can't give you a list of basic necessities that constitute Jesus' idea of *daily bread*.** I recommend you use common sense, and when it's unclear, just pray for it anyways. **It's better to lift that request up to God in prayer than to sit on it thinking God might get mad.** That he might be annoyed. We've already said that's not possible if you're a Christian, if you're approaching prayer in Christ. Trust that the golden scepter is extended towards you, and lift up that request even if you're not sure if it's really a necessity or just a luxury.

A Prayer to Express Daily Dependence

- ❖ But make sure you do it with our third point in mind. This petition is ultimately a prayer to express daily dependence. So even if your specific request goes unanswered – because it turns out to be, in God's estimation, a luxury OR it is a necessity but God has a bigger plan in mind so he's withholding for a reason you don't yet understand – **either way, prayer is not a lever you pull or a button you push to get something out of a divine vending machine.**
- ❖ In giving us this invitation to ask for daily bread, Jesus is not handing us a blank check. That's not what prayer is. It's not about rubbing a genie's bottle. **Your wish is not God's command.** You can name it, but you're not necessarily going to claim it.

- ❖ The problem is that we still see prayer mainly as a way to get things from God. **But prayer is ultimately a means to affirm God's God-ness and to express our creatureliness, our creaturely dependence on him every day.**
 - ▶ That's why it's called *daily* bread. That word (*epiousios*) is difficult to translate. Your Bible might have a footnote that says it could also be translated "*our bread for tomorrow*". A number of commentators I read say you can go either way. If this petition is prayed in morning, you're referring to the needs of that day, but if prayed at night, then you're referring to the needs of the next day.

- ❖ **The main point is that you're expressing day-to-day dependence on God for everything you need in life.** You're not asking for weekly bread or monthly bread. We need daily bread because we can't get through a day without God and his grace.
 - ▶ Since there was no refrigeration in Jesus' day, people actually relied on food one day at a time. Again that's something we can't fathom. **We're normally under this illusion of self-reliance – this illusion of being our own providers.** But every so often a big storm will come through and knock out our power for a few days, and then we're humbled and reminded of our daily neediness.

- ❖ God had to do something similar to the Israelites in the book of Exodus. He placed them in the wilderness where they couldn't grow their own crops and feed themselves. So there was no chance of deceiving themselves into thinking they're their own providers. There was nothing to grow, nothing to hunt. It was an empty wilderness.
 - ▶ **But one day they wake up and, like morning dew, the ground was covered by manna – bread from heaven.** It was just there on the ground waiting to be gathered, and by the time the sun got hot, it would melt away (Ex. 16:21). But then it would be there again the next morning. Every day of their journey in the wilderness, when they awoke, daily manna would be there for them (16:35).
 - **You couldn't save any and keep it as a fall back plan in case God doesn't pull through.** Some tried but the Bible says the manna rotted. It bred worms and stank (16:20). You had to trust God. That he would provide every new day. Trust that every morning you'll find new mercies (Lam. 3:22-23).

- ❖ I'm sure Jesus had that in mind when he taught his disciples to pray for daily bread. It's about trusting God on a daily basis. Look, I want to be clear: Jesus is not against having a savings account or a retirement plan. **There's nothing wrong with planning for the future. But there is something wrong if your hope and dependence is resting on what you have stored up for the future** (cf. Lk. 12:19-20).
 - ▶ Treasures on earth will rot. Moths and rust will destroy. By praying "Give us this day our daily bread" you're acknowledging this reality. You're expressing that your trust is in God, even if he's the one who has put you in the wilderness.
 - Perhaps you're going through the wilderness right now. **All the things or people you instinctively turn to and depend on are not there. But God is.** His mercy is there each new morning. He will provide your daily bread.

- ❖ If this is how you approach prayer – if it’s about expressing daily dependence, about acknowledging your creatureliness, admitting you’re not God and you’re not the ultimate Provider (for you or your family) – then you’re in a better position to handle those times when prayer goes unanswered.
- ❖ You have to be realistic. Not all of your prayers will be answered the way you want. **But dealing with unanswered prayer, facing the wilderness in your prayer life, is probably the best way to gauge how you really view God.** Whether you see him as a Faithful Father who provides our daily bread OR as a divine vending machine, as a genie in a bottle.
 - ▶ If a prayer of yours continues to go unanswered and your response is, “Father, you know best. I trust you know what you’re doing.” – that indicates one view of God. But if your response is, “What’s the point? What’s the use of praying? What’s the point in believing in God?” – **maybe unanswered prayer is God’s way of showing you the deficiency, not just in your view of prayer, but your view of God.** Maybe unanswered prayer is part of his new mercies designed to mature you and your faith.
- ❖ There’s this beautiful passage in Proverbs 30 that expresses the same heart behind this fourth petition. **Proverbs 30:7-9** says to God, *“⁷Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die: ⁸Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, ⁹lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the LORD?” or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.”*
 - ▶ That’s the spirit behind our prayer for daily bread. Lord, give what is needful for me. **Not so little** that I’m tempted to sinfully take matters into my own hands and steal. And **not so much** – don’t bless me so much! – that I’m tempted to sinfully take matters into my own hands and no longer pray. And no longer feel the need to pray.

A Prayer to Express Global Solidarity

- ❖ That’s what we’re telling God when we ask, “Give us today our daily bread”. Now notice with me the pronouns *us* and *our*. Give us our bread. Not give me my bread. Not even give my family our bread. **The plural pronouns challenge us to expand the scope of our prayers.** It causes us to think of the needs of others. That’s our fourth point. This is a prayer that we can pray to express global solidarity.
- ❖ Saying “Give us” reminds you, as a Christian, that you’re part of something bigger than yourself, than your family, than your church. You’re part of God’s universal, global Church. **Saying “Give us” expressed your solidarity with your brothers and sisters around the globe,** especially those we’ve already mentioned are actually hungry for literal bread.
 - ▶ **Do you realize that when you begin to pray for *us* – the global *us* – to receive our daily bread, you’re involving yourself in the very means by which God plans to provide for the hungry and needy around the world?** Your prayers make a difference. And at the same time, they remind us and convict us to add to our thoughts and prayers – our finances and material resources. They’re all important.

- ❖ When we begin to pray for *us* – the global *us* – it breaks us free from the small-mindedness that typifies our prayer lives. It frees us from our self-centeredness, from our tribal-ness. **God is not a tribal deity**, but we treat him that way when our prayer requests are limited to the needs and concerns of our own people.
- ❖ I've thought a lot about this over the past couple of days. It's been making me want to pray for *us*. With all the recent shootings, all the innocent lives brutally taken, with our society deeply divided in so many ways – by black and white and now black and blue – it's more important than ever to stand together, to kneel together, in solidarity.
 - ▶ I'm not black. No one in my family is in law enforcement. I don't live in Dallas or Baton Rouge or Falcon Heights. I might be saddened and disturbed by recent events, but I'm also tempted to think the events don't involve me directly.
- ❖ But they do. They involve all of us. **They have to do with the image of God that you and I bear.** The same *imago dei* that was borne by Alton Sterling, by Philando Castile, by Officer Patrick Zamarripa, by Officer Brent Thompson, by Officer Michael Krol, by Officer Lorne Ahrens, and by Officer Michael Smith.
 - ▶ **The sins of racism and murder specifically attack and deface the image of God imprinted on their souls.** And because we share with the victims the same *imago dei*, these are attacks against *us*. Therefore, it's only right to pray for *us as a people*.
- ❖ *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name* – even in the senselessness of recent events. Let the world know that you reign Sovereign and Supreme, that your kingdom has not lost an inch of ground since the chaos began.
 - ▶ *Let your kingdom come, let your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven* – in heaven where no one is treated differently because of the color of their skin, where no one harbors hate and vengeance, where violence and bloodshed are nowhere to be found. Let that vision of society come to earth. Let that future break into our present.
 - *Give us this day our daily bread* – provide us the good government and peace that Luther spoke of, give us healing as a fractured society and healing especially for victims recovering from their wounds and comfort to the families who are mourning.
 - *Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors* – pardon us for the hate and vengeance and racism in our own hearts and give us hearts that are able to forgive even those who murder in cold-blood.
 - *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil* – protect us from evil people and the evil one who seeks to do us harm. Protect members of the black community. Protect officers of the law. Deliver us. Deliver us all.
- ❖ This is a prayer of solidarity. It causes us to break out of our own bubbles – our own little worlds – and to see that we are part of something bigger. Of the Church in particular and of humanity in general. “Give us this day our daily bread” covers all of us and all of our needs.

A Prayer to Confess Spiritual Neediness

- ❖ But what we need, what our country needs, and what the black community and other minority communities need – is more than peace and healing, more than safety and security, more than dialogue and understanding. Not less but certainly more. We have spiritual needs that are only met by the grace of God. And that’s also in this petition. This is our last point. This prayer for daily bread is a prayer that confesses spiritual neediness.
- ❖ As we mentioned before, commentators suggest this phrase *daily bread* is better translated as “the bread of tomorrow”. Of course it's a reference to the needs of the next day, but you could argue that there's a future element in this prayer that stretches beyond the next day.
 - ▶ **The bread of tomorrow can be understood as pointing to an eternal tomorrow – when the kingdom of heaven comes to earth in all its fullness and glory.** On that day, the people of God will feast together on the bread of heaven. That’s the bread we’re all after. That’s what we ultimately need.
- ❖ We can pray for stomachs to be filled – but they’ll grow hungry again. We can pray for peace for our nation – but another incident could strike another match and a conflagration of violence will return. We can pray for marriages to be healed and families to be restored – but distrust and disrespect are stubborn weeds hard to uproot.
 - ▶ We should pray for this day. Pray for the present. **But just know that we won’t be satisfied until we feast on the bread of heaven.** That’s the spiritual neediness of all humanity. So "Give us this day the bread of tomorrow" is really asking for the bread of heaven to come down to be tasted on earth today.
- ❖ And the good news is that he already has come once before. Jesus said of himself in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel, “*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.*” (Jn. 6:51)
 - ▶ **Jesus is the ultimate Bread of Heaven.** God may grant your petition for daily bread, but until you feast on Christ, until you have a relationship with him, you'll be never be satisfied. Whatever necessity you have in mind when you're praying for daily bread – if you receive it – still won’t be enough.
 - We know this is true because there are plenty of highly successful figures in history who received their daily bread *and daily dessert* a million times over, and yet they were some of the most dissatisfied and disillusioned individuals.
- ❖ I watched a documentary called the *Men Who Built America* about men like **Cornelius Vanderbilt** (the railroad magnate), **John D. Rockefeller** (the oil tycoon, world’s first billionaire and possibly richest person in history), and **Henry Ford** (the automotive pioneer).
 - ▶ They have colleges, buildings, and companies named after them. They had all the necessities and luxuries you could ask for. And yet Vanderbilt is quoted as saying, “*The care of \$200 million is enough to kill anyone. There is no pleasure in it.*” Rockefeller once admitted, “*I have made my millions, but they have brought me no happiness.*” Ford supposedly said, “*I was happier when doing a mechanic’s job.*”

- ❖ These are some of the greatest, most successful entrepreneurs in human history. So why do they sound so sad and discouraged? **Because they're proof that the daily bread of this earth will always fail to satisfy your truest hunger, your spiritual neediness.**
 - ▶ Friends, you and I have a deep-seated hunger for heavenly bread. All your earthly bread, all your earthly possessions, all your earthly relationships – as precious as they are – are only appetizers. They're not enough and, if you're honest with yourself, you know this to be true.
 - You were made to feast on the Bread of Heaven. And he makes himself available if you'd only receive him by faith, by satisfying your soul in Christ, in who he is and all that he's done for you in his cross and resurrection. If you've never tasted and seen for yourself that the Lord Jesus is good, today he's calling. He's inviting you to pray this petition and receive him by faith.