

Matthew 6:11
August 16, 2009

Hampton Baptist
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Sermon Series on The Lord's Prayer

"Give Us Daily Bread"

Alyce Donahue grew up in a Christian home where they prayed before every meal. When she was six, a friend invited her to her house for dinner. Alyce's mother, whose name was Grace, gently reminded her of appropriate manners and flexibility regarding the mealtime habits of other families. When Alyce's friend's family sat down to eat, her mother turned to her and asked, "Do you say grace at your house?" Thinking the question rather strange --but remembering her mother's instructions to be polite--she replied, "No, I just say Mommy." (Alyce Donahue, Murrieta, CA in TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN, Nov./Dec. 1995, p. 35.)

When saying grace at our house, we include the phrase "Give us Lord our daily bread." Jesus included the phrase *Give us this day, our daily bread* in the Model Prayer. We sometimes say the prayer without thinking, just rote going through the motions. But each time we pray The Lord's Prayer, we are petitioning God with a variety of needs.

The first three appeals of The Lord's Prayer have to do with God and with the glory of God; my three previous sermons (*Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come, and Thy will be done*) have addressed each of these. The second half of the Lord's Prayer addresses **our** needs and **our** necessities, which will be the focus of the next three sermons (*Daily Bread, Forgiveness and Temptation*). It is only when *God's* proper place is established that all other things fall into *their* proper places.

The second half of The Lord's Prayer deals with the three essential needs of humanity, as well as the three spheres of time. First, it asks for bread, which is for the *present*. Next, it addresses the *past* in seeking forgiveness. And finally, it commits the *future* into the hands of God by asking for help with temptation. So we are to give our pasts, presents and futures to God; we pray for that every week, and many of us were not even aware of it.

But today, we focus on *Give us this day, our daily bread*. There are five basic truths that can be determined from this simple phrase. The first is that God cares about our bodies. It is no secret that without food, we cannot live. The World Hunger problem plagues billions around the globe.

Jesus set the example in caring for others' physical needs through his healing ministry, yet let's not forget the feeding of more than 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two pieces of fish. The feeding of the 5,000 is probably the most significant miracle that Jesus performed, because it is the *only* miracle recorded in all four gospels. Jesus was concerned that all these people had followed him away from their homes, and that they faced a long walk home without food. So he used the food of a small boy to feed more than 5,000 people, and there were twelve baskets left over.

Any teaching that belittles or abuses the bodies that God has given us is wrong. In Genesis, the writer sought to explain the process of our creation. He wrote that God breathed into man's nostrils, and man became a living soul. That Hebrew word for *soul* means the whole being: spiritual, physical and emotional. God cares about our physical needs as well as our spiritual and emotional necessities.

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, wrote "Do you not know that your body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit?" Therefore, we are to take care of ourselves. Christianity aims at *whole* salvation, not just *soul* salvation; God is concerned about the spirit, mind, and body.

The second truth is that the petition teaches us to pray for our *daily* bread, for bread for the coming day. In other words, we are to live one day at a time, yet many of us fall prey to that heinous

Page 2

monster called worry. Genetically speaking, I have often wondered if mothers have a worry gene. But mothers aren't the only people who worry. Many of us get anxious at some level about our futures.

Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Consider the lilies of the field, they neither toil nor spin, but I tell you that King Solomon in all his glory was never adorned like one of these. Consider the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth more than the birds? Therefore, do not be anxious then; do not worry about what you will eat, or what you will wear; because life is more than food and the body is more than clothing. So do not worry about what might happen in the future; tomorrow will take care of itself." Jesus was a strong believer in living today; do not worry about tomorrow, and stop living in the past. What's done is done. Live today; ask for *daily* bread; ask God to be with you today.

When Jesus taught his disciples this prayer, I wondered if he thought of the Children of Israel when he mentioned "daily bread." When they left the throes of the Pharaoh, Moses led them through the wilderness toward a land promised to them. God provided for all their physical needs; even their sandals did not wear out in all those forty years of wilderness wanderings. And they never went hungry. God promised them that they would have meat in the evening and bread in the morning, as much as they needed to be full. Exodus 16:4 states, "Behold I will rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out, and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in my instruction." The Israelites were instructed to gather their bread, which came along as dew, every morning, and also not to gather more than they could eat. Some gathered more hoping to store it, yet it spoiled before they could eat it again. God had told them through Moses to get *daily* portions. The question was could they place their entire faith and dependence on God?

That is a question that we must answer as well. Many of us have trouble depending on someone else. Our society has applauded the self-help movement, because people are supposed to be able to pull themselves up by their boot straps and work it out. As Americans, we are proud of our work ethic and ingenuity.

Many of you have seen the movie *Apollo 13*, a wonderful flick. While I personally do not remember the story when it happened in the early 70s, I am impressed with this epic story of overcoming obstacles. The astronauts and Mission Control in Houston were able to work together to bring back three men who should have died in space. The odds were against them on many occasions; yet people kept working, kept trying, and as a result, the mission of bringing the astronauts home safely was successful.

We become impressed with what we can do, which means the flip side of this coin is that it is sometimes difficult to allow God *to drive the bus*. It is much easier when we know what is going to happen *tomorrow*, what is around the bend, what may be found at the end of the rainbow.

But when those variables are removed, when our faith is challenged, when we have to depend totally on God, many feel like they are standing on thin ice. It is a place where we are afraid to be; maybe we are afraid that our foundation is not strong enough. Cognitively, we know that God will never fail us nor leave us. Yet it would be so easy not to have to depend on God and seek to do it ourselves. Some of us *are* self-made, and we like to be in control. We like to lead. Yet we are to depend on God, every day . . . that day . . . one day at a time.

Farming is one of the few remaining professions that *depends* on God. Jennifer and I once saw a play about some farmers leaving the rural lifestyle in North Georgia after World War II and moving to Atlanta to get factory jobs. Some of the mountain folks said that those who were leaving farming were turning their backs on God. They were no longer depending on God for their living; instead they were depending on the factories and the time-clocks. Some of the mountain people viewed technology as taking the place of God.

Page 3

But I also know that today, modern technology has certainly affected the farmer as well. More efficient irrigation practices have resulted from technology, as well as insecticides and fertilizers. But farmers still have to depend on God for seeds, I think. Whether we are farmers, professionals, factory workers, preachers, or teachers, we are all called to depend on God for our daily bread.

The third truth of the phrase *Give us this day, our daily bread* is that we realize God's proper place. Essentially we are admitting that God is the One who gives us our food. Our food is the direct gift from God. Now we are not depending on God for manna as the Children of Israel were, but instead, if God is our Creator, then we have to acknowledge that God is ultimately the donor of our meals. God does not get out the checkbook at Olive Garden, and God does not put the groceries in the cabinet and refrigerator. But God did create the world, including all the animals and plant-life. And as I said, God still creates seeds, just like God creates baby calves. So food therefore, is the direct gift from God.

It is a shame that those in the poorest countries of the world, those who have the least amount of food and resources, seem to understand and appreciate this concept more than we who live in the land of abundance. When those in Third World countries pray, *Give us this day, our daily bread*, they really mean it. They recognize that God grants them food for another day. We would do well to learn this same lesson.

The fourth truth to be gleaned is that this petition reminds us of how prayer works. If someone prayed this prayer, *Give us this day, our daily bread*, and then just sat back and waited for bread to fall into his/her lap, chances are that the person would starve. Instead, we should be *active* participants in our prayer life. Dependence on God doesn't mean that we no longer have responsibilities. Prayer and work should go hand in hand. It is true that seeds come from God, but they certainly will not grow to their fullest potential without someone to work the ground, plant the seed, and take care of the plant.

There was a man who obtained a parcel of land. With great labor, he cleared the stones, pulled all the weeds, enriched the soil, and finally planted seeds. He meticulously cared for his garden until it produced lovely flowers and vegetables. One evening, he was showing a pious friend his garden plot. The pious friend said, "It's wonderful what God can do with a bit of ground like this, isn't it?"

"Yes," the owner replied, "but you should have seen it when only God was responsible for the land." Prayer, like faith, without works is dead.

We all think it ridiculous to buy vegetable seeds, never plant them, and yet pray and maybe even expect God to deliver us fresh corn, green beans or whatever. That kind of thinking is absurd. Yet how many of us will pray for something, expecting an answer, and yet not do our part to help God answer our prayer?

It's like the student who enters a classroom to take a test and hasn't studied, then prays that God will help him/her to pass the test. Instead, we have to do our part.

Charles Sinclair is a lawyer who was locked inside the trunk of a car by kidnapers. He eventually escaped from his captors when they drove into a hospital complex, slowed down for a speed bump, which allowed him to dive out of the trunk to alert the guards. He made his escape with a tire iron which he used to pry open the trunk latch. He said, "I was praying harder than I had ever prayed in my life. I knew that my only chance of escaping was to pry open that trunk. But as I was praying as hard as I had ever prayed, I was prying like a madman."

That's a good combination, praying and prying. That is what God wants us to do. Praying as if everything depended on God, and prying as if everything depended on us. Unfortunately for many, instead of praying and prying, the route taken is complaining and crying. Someone once said, "God feeds the sparrows, but doesn't put the crumbs into their mouths."

Page 4

So, this phrase *Give us this day, our daily bread*, reminds us that God cares for our bodies, that we are to be dependent on God, that food is a direct gift from God, and it also reminds us of how prayer works. Finally, we are taught not to be selfish. Jesus did not say, "Give *me my* daily bread," but instead he said, "Give *us our* daily bread."

One of the major problems regarding World Hunger is not that there is a food shortage; on the contrary, there is more than enough food to satisfy all the world's inhabitants. The problem is not the *supply* of life's essentials; it is the *distribution* of them. We are praying that God can use us to help feed those who do not have enough to eat. We are praying that God can use us to provide shelter for those who are homeless. We are praying that God can use us to help bring healing to a hurting world and light to the darkness. This prayer is not only a prayer that we may *receive* our daily bread, it is also a prayer that we may *share* with others our daily bread, our staff of life, the material goods that help us to live.

And now, after discussing these five truths, may we still pray, *Give us this day, our daily bread*.