

Praying for Our Needs

Matthew 6:9-13

I still remember having a friend in our home for a meal many years ago, a kind and polite adult man. And I remember that sometime during the meal, I offered him the salt-shaker, which he gladly accepted and used rather profusely. The salt-shaker had been sitting on the table, but he didn't ask for it to be passed to him because he had been taught that it was always impolite to ask for anything at the dining room table.

Now, in this day of widespread ignorance of manners altogether, I appreciate his reserve and politeness, but surely that example goes too far. Yet it serves as an adequate illustration of how some people view God as they pray to him. Having been taught never to ask for anything, many people, many Christians, are very, very hesitant to ask God for the requests and desires of their heart. They fear the guilt or feelings of selfishness if they ask, so they don't. And as a result, as James puts it, "they do not have because they do not ask."

Now, on the other hand, some people seem to equate prayer with a shopping list, or perhaps, even worse, a child sitting on Santa's lap in order to give him a long list of requested Christmas presents. Such expressions of selfishness is surely not the intention of our Lord when he teaches his disciples to pray, but we are nonetheless given great encouragement to pray for our needs. As Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

This is the example Jesus uses to teach his disciples to pray.

Luke 11:5 "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing

to set before him'; 7 and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? 8 I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. 9 "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."

Likewise, this is our encouragement about the very nature of faith,

Luke 18:1 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, 2 saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. 3 Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' 4 And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, 5 yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' " 6 Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. 7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

Faith is the persistence to come to God as this widow came to that unbelieving judge. The widow kept bothering the judge, and so the judge finally gave her what she wanted. That's the example of prayer. As it is put so succinctly in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Yet, the question is still appropriate, why pray if God knows everything? Why pray if, as we studied last week, God works out

everything according to the counsel of his own will? The simple answer is that prayer expresses your trust in God, a child-like trust.

I. PRAYER IS AN EXPRESSION OF YOUR HUMBLE TRUST IN GOD TO MEET ALL YOUR NEEDS.

That really is the point, I believe. When you are forced to ask for something, because of your need, it shows where your trust is. It is a childlike trust. A child who trusts his parents for anything, for everything. The command is really very, very simple.

Mat. 7:7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”

Likewise,

1 John 5:14 “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”

The confidence of trust. That is what prayer is all about. The confidence that God will give you what you ask. That is tempered by your submission to God’s will even in what you ask, but the stark language is so very striking. “If we ask anything according to his will he hears us.” “Ask, and it will be given to you.”

But think about it for a minute. Something very important has to happen in order for you to be able to ask. It is something very humbling.

A. You must realize that you are not self-sufficient by your own power.

If you are honest with yourself, I suspect that is a reason why many requests go unasked. It is our own sense of self-sufficiency. There is nothing new about that, for God warns his Old Covenant people of Israel with these words:

Deut. 8:17 “...then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’ 18 “And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.”

We do that, don’t we? Maybe not in those explicit words, but that does become the attitude of the heart. “My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.” You don’t pray very well when that mindset is present. Quite the opposite, when you are desperate, when your self-sufficiency has failed, and failed miserably, when you are at your wit’s end, at the end of your rope, then you pray a lot! When you really can’t do anything about a particular situation, you are much more likely to “let your requests be known to God.” Your own self-sufficiency accomplishes nothing.

Something else accomplishes nothing as well. Your anxiety.

B. You must realize that your anxiety accomplishes nothing.

But we all like to worry, don’t we? Despite what Jesus says,

Mat. 6:25 “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 “So why do you

worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

Your anxiety doesn't help a bit, does it? You don't gain anything, not a single hour to your life. In fact, as we understand so well now, anxiety is often harmful. It can actually shorten your life. So if you are going to pray, instead of worrying, you have to be convinced that your worrying will be counterproductive. And that such anxiety ought to be replaced by the petitions of prayer.

Phil. 4:6 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Simple, isn't it? Simple concept. Easy to declare and proclaim. Not so easy to put into practice. But it is where you must start. The humble trust in God which is built upon a complete and total rejection of your own self-reliance. And that goes against the grain. It is contrary to our nature, our fallen nature. It isn't the American way. We pride ourselves in self-reliance. We pride ourselves in never asking, never needing to ask, never making ourselves beholden to anyone. And being consumed with worry and anxiety as we do it.

No, beloved, that's all wrong. We are to ask. Pray, with petitions. Let your requests be made known to God. Jesus teaches you to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

Now, my second point, let me emphasize the daily nature of that prayer. And the daily nature of God's provision. That's what trust is all about. As when God gave his Old Covenant people manna in the desert, he provides for our daily needs, daily. So,

II. PRAYER IS AN EXPRESSION OF YOUR HUMBLE TRUST IN GOD FOR DAILY PROVISION.

So with a bit of a different emphasis than normal, we read this in the Lord's Prayer, “Give us THIS day our DAILY bread.”

In other words, it is a prayer that must be repeated daily, for the request is for today. Only for today. Trusting God means that when he gives you what you need today, when the day is over you thank him. Then you wake up the next morning and go through the same process all over again. You see, the reality of our relationship with God is this,

A. God promises daily sustenance, daily.

God doesn't promise to provide for tomorrow. He promises to provide for today. Living out faith on that level is one of the great challenges to the Christian life. We want to provide for tomorrow. So I have retirement savings. I have some money set aside for college education. I would like to have money set aside for a new car. In terms of financial management, all of those things are wise and prudent. But in the realm of your relationship with God, they become a denial of true faith.

So after Jesus says, “Do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ... [S]eek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all

these things will be added to you...”, he says,

Mat. 6:34 “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

This is such a crucial aspect of biblical faith. It is a trust in God for today! Thus, it is a daily trust, a willingness to live day by day. A willingness to live without anxiety regarding tomorrow, and to believe that when tomorrow arrives, God’s promise will still be true and it will still be fulfilled, that he will provide for your needs tomorrow, tomorrow. God promises daily sustenance, daily.

God gave the people of Israel manna, every day for forty years. Every morning they were to gather up what they needed for that day, but no more. Anything extra would rot and spoil over night. They were to take no provision for tomorrow, but trust God day after day. It was a test of their trust. These were his words as they were about to enter the promised land of Canaan,

Deut. 8:2 “And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. 3 So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. 4 Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years.”

Beloved, please let all of this sink down deeply into your soul. I am not interested in being crassly literal, that the literal existence of any need tomorrow should never be the subject of your prayer, but this principle must become real and meaningful with regard to the future. God calls his people to live in the present, and to trust him in the present. And he calls us to pray for the needs of the

present, “Give us this day our daily needs.”

The Bible does speak about the future, and the emphasis is again upon trust.

B. God calls us to trust him as we wait upon future events.

James 4:13 “Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; 14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15 Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” 16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.”

So when you plan for tomorrow, the plan always includes these words clearly implied and understood, “Lord willing.” “Tomorrow I will do this or that, if the Lord wills.”

That’s faith. That’s trust. That’s part and parcel of what it means to pray, “Give us today our daily bread.” You are not looking for definitive promise regarding anything tomorrow. You may well make plans and preparations, but always, it depends upon what the Lord chooses to bring to pass. So when it comes to the future, wait. But today is a different story altogether.

And prayer is an expression of your trust today, to seek from God today what you need today. So prayer, by that definition, must be a daily event. Yet how often do we go through days, perhaps several days in a row, when prayer is not the strength of your life nor the foundation of your soul. Please recognize this daily emphasis. Day after day, express to God your humble, childlike trust to meet all your needs. Day after day, ask him for whatever it is you need that day.

I don't think that the effectiveness of your prayers is found in the words you use, or whatever eloquence you may or may not have. No, the effectiveness depends upon the daily repetition, the daily exercise of faith, the daily demonstration of trust. The daily prayer.

One more thought in all of this. Something else that is expressed by your prayers.

III. PRAYER IS AN EXPRESSION OF YOUR HUMBLE TRUST IN GOD'S GOODNESS.

Prayer is not an exercise in fatalism. This is not deism. This is not naturalism. This is a revelation of God as powerful, able to do anything, and good. So when you pray, you are trusting in the unshakeable reality that God is good.

Mat. 7: 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"

This sense of God's goodness does two important things for you as you pray. First knowing that God is good will enable you to develop and exercise,

A. The virtue of contentment.

A contentment that comes from knowing that God works all things together for good. That what God provides you is good. That what you receive is, therefore, sufficient for your need. Indeed, ask. Ask for anything, ask for any desire of your heart, as long as it is not contrary to God's revealed will. But whatever God provides, however he answers, learn this grace of being satisfied.

1 Tim. 6:6 "Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content."

Similarly,

Phil. 4:11 "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."

Godliness with contentment. That's the result of faithful prayer. A humble trust in God's goodness, that's the result of faithful prayer. A willingness to accept from God's hand whatever he chooses, whatever he deems to be right. That's the result of faithful prayer.

The virtue of contentment, learned from the experiences of life, that's the context for your prayer. So prayer is not arguing with God, though it might involve laying out your case as in a lawsuit. Prayer is not rebelling against God, nor chafing against him when you don't get what you want. For when you pray, God may well say what he said to Paul when he pleaded for his thorn in the flesh to be removed,

2 Cor. 12:9 "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

Faithful prayer means that you respond as Paul did in that situation.

2 Cor. 12:9 "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Asking God for your daily bread means depending upon God for you daily bread. And depending upon God means being satisfied with the expression of his goodness in response to your

request, content with whatever that answer might be. And with that contentment,

B. An abundance of gratitude.

Phil. 4:6 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”

With thanksgiving. With gratitude. Prayer is so well expressed in the repeated words of,

Ps. 136:1 “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. 2 Oh, give thanks to the God of gods! For His mercy endures forever. 3 Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! For His mercy endures forever.”

So prayer is not just a laundry list. It is not just a shopping list. Trusting in God, prayer must embody the contentment and gratitude of your soul. And as you exercise such trust,

Mat. 7:7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”

Ask for things specific. Ask for things impossible. Ask for things important. Ask for things routine. Ask for help. Ask for strength. Ask for anything. Ask for everything. Ask your heavenly father for whatever you need or desire, trusting him to give you what is good. Ask every day. “Give us this day our daily bread.”