

Are you thinking, as I am, that to pray, “*give us today our daily bread*” applies to the enormous problems of hunger, poverty, and injustice that we face today? When I pray this line in the Lord’s Prayer I am acutely aware that millions of people on this planet do not and will not receive their daily bread. Here’s a truly sobering statistic: According to UNICEF over 25,000 children die of hunger-related causes each day. (<https://www.unicef.org/>). What a very sad reality.

The biblical story of hunger can be traced back to Exodus 16 where God shows Israel that their deliverance from Egypt now means they are free to live in the assurance of God’s daily provision. But they grumble about it. With quail in the evening and manna in the morning God provides for his people. In the Sinai wilderness, God graciously supplies Israel with their daily bread.

In John 6, Jesus announces that he is “*the bread of life*” (v. 35). When we ask for “daily bread” we are also praying for “*the bread of life.*” Life with Jesus implies his presence and peace are given to those who ask, besides our daily bread. Because the prayer asks God for something, it opens up an expression of gratitude for the bread received, and for careful living so that all may eat.

*Even though thanksgiving, per se, is not explicitly mentioned in the Lord’s Prayer, I think it is implied in the line that we focus on today: “*Give us today our daily bread*” (Matt. 6:11). It’s simple to reason that we are to be alert not only to the need that we have every day for food, but to the reality of God’s daily provision for our needs. That realization, of course, should move us to an attitude of thanksgiving. In a previous sermon, I noted that the Lord’s Prayer begins with the address, “*Our Father in heaven,*” and then moves next to, “*Hallowed be Your name*” and “*Your kingdom come.*” The focus of the prayer in its initial petitions is on God’s glory and God’s kingdom. That’s where the focus of all our prayers needs to be. But notice that a shift occurs. In this phrase, Jesus begins to show his disciples how they ought to pray for their own needs. We often begin our prayers by reminding God of our personal needs, without expressing so much as a word of praise or thanksgiving.

This simple request has much to teach us. Notice that Jesus didn’t teach us to pray that God would *sell* us our daily bread or render it to us *in exchange* for our service; instead, in this petition, we humbly ask God to give us something. We ask him to give us daily bread. We are so needy as to be destitute, but as the Psalm declares, God owns “*the cattle on a thousand hills*” (Psalm 50:10). We go to him as beggars asking for his charity. Scripture assures us that we can depend on God to respond to such requests, for he is a giving God.

God gives his gifts in order to provide for the needs of his people. God is a God of providence. In the book of Genesis, you may recall, God’s great promise to Abraham is that he would be the father of a great nation that his descendants would be as the grains of sand on the seashore and as the stars in the sky. At the time the promise was made, Abraham’s wife, Sarah, was childless. Finally, after many years elapsed, Sarah brought forth a son, whose name was Isaac. There was no happier set of parents in all of history than those two on the day God began to fulfill his promise in their old age. Just a few years later, however, there came a day when God said to Abraham, “*Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of*

which I shall tell you” (Gen. 22:2). It seems God was saying, “I gave you this gift, Isaac, but now I want you to give him back to me.” But Abraham did not hesitate.

We’re told that he “*rose early in the morning*” and set out on the three-day journey to Moriah. But when he and Isaac came to God’s appointed mountain, and they were climbing up toward the conclusion of this heart-wrenching episode, Isaac noticed that one of the key requirements for a sacrifice seemed to be missing. “*The fire and wood are here,*” Isaac said, “*but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?*” (v. 7). Abraham took a deep breath and said to his son, “*God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.*” (v. 8). He was trusting God to provide a sacrifice other than Isaac. God proved faithful to do just that, staying Abraham’s hand in the moment when he was about to sacrifice Isaac and providing a ram instead (v. 12-13).

R.C. Sproul* writes, “This is the first occasion in the Bible when the idea of divine providence is mentioned. Providence is about God’s provision. An integral element of that providence is His provision for our ultimate need of salvation—He provided Jesus, the Lamb without out blemish, who was crucified for us. The God of providence is also concerned about our mundane, everyday needs, such as food to eat, water to drink, clothes to wear, and shelter for our bodies. Therefore, in His providence, He gives us what we need for daily life.” But we need more than food. Remember when he was tempted in the wilderness, Jesus said, “*Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*”

Have you noticed something of a resurgence in Agnosticism and Atheism in this country in recent years? More and more people have begun to question the validity of the claims of religions, particularly Christianity, of a supernatural being at work in the world. They say the claims of Christianity, that Jesus was God’s own Son, born in human flesh; that Jesus died and then came back to life; that he could walk on water and through locked doors, must surely be the inventions of his followers.

Yet we Christians firmly believe that what we read in God’s word is true. So why do unbelievers not believe? I think it may be related to the spiritual nature of his message. Earlier in John 6 we read, “*Jesus answered them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.’*” (26)

When Jesus fed the 5000, some of the people saw and enjoyed what Jesus did for what it was, but their conclusion wasn’t quite right. They saw the miracle of bread appearing from nowhere and thought they were in on a good thing. If he could do that then he could feed them anytime, anywhere. But Jesus tells them they’ve got it all wrong. There are two sorts of food. There’s the bread that nourishes our physical existence, but that’s doomed to perish in the end. There’s also bread that nourishes our spiritual existence that will last forever. In John 6:27 he says: “*Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.*”

These people were materialists. They saw the miracle but they missed the meaning of it. Jesus looked at the crowd and saw not just hungry people, but people searching in vain for something to fill a spiritual vacuum within them. These people weren’t any different from people today—like sheep without a shepherd, as Mark describes them in his gospel. Jesus feeds them as a sign of the deeper spiritual truth

that he has food for us that will satisfy our spiritual hunger, a food, he says, that will endure for eternal life. The difficulty so many people have today is that they're materialists just like these Galileans and all they can see is their material needs. They're working so hard that they don't have time to stop and think about their spiritual needs; about the fact that they need food that endures for eternal life, which only the Son of Man can give.

That's the first obstacle. The second reason some find it hard to believe is because of the scandal of the Cross. Jesus takes the idea of the bread that comes down from heaven and extends it to describe what he's going to do on the Cross. *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."* (John 6:51). He's not speaking literally here. Nor is he saying that by eating bread and drinking wine at communion you'll gain eternal life. No.

Throughout this passage Jesus tells them there's only one way to receive eternal life. He repeats himself over and over. Back in v. 47 he states, *"Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life."* So it's fairly clear that eating his flesh is a metaphor for believing in what he's done with his flesh: that is, his death on the Cross; his flesh given for the life of the world.

To believe in Jesus Christ means to have the life that the Father gives to the Son, to participate in Christ's salvation. So if there are two obvious reasons why people fail to believe in Jesus, what about the 2 and a half billion people who believe in Jesus? I think there are two simple reasons for believing:

1) Faith is a gift from God. You may not like the idea that our coming to Christ is the work of God rather than your own intelligent, deliberate choice, yet that's the message of the gospel. Everything that has to do with our salvation comes from God, just as our "daily bread" is also God's gift. As we think more deeply about this, it should become a thing of comfort. If you think about how hard it is for each of us to remain faithful to God as a Christian, we'll realize how blessed we are that God takes the first step in bringing us to himself.

2) And secondly, what alternative is there? Later, after *"many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him,"* Jesus asks them: *"You do not want to leave too, do you?"* (v. 67) Simon Peter answers, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"* (v. 68) It's pretty clear cut. What alternative do they have, or do we have? Atheism doesn't provide the answers to life's hardest questions. It certainly doesn't offer any hope for the future. Survival of the fittest is fine if you're one of the fittest, but not for the rest of us. Only Jesus can give us that which leads to eternal life, forgiveness of our sins and peace with God. The choice is the same today as it was 2000 years ago. If you're one who is still deciding, then ask God to open your eyes so you can see the truth about Jesus and come to believe in him. Ask him to feed you with the bread that endures to eternal life, so you too will live with him forever.

Lord, we humbly pray, *"give us today our daily bread."* Amen.

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