

Give us this day our daily bread. Bethesda Bible Teaching. 21 November 2010.

Our reading for this morning consists of just one verse ... Matthew chapter 6, verse 11 ... 'Give us this day our daily bread'.

But, before we launch into our subject, let us briefly get our bearings. As we have seen in previous weeks, the prayer which our Lord taught His disciples to pray – unlike too many of my prayers – does not begin with one's personal – still less physical – needs. For, before our Lord even mentions the disciples' needs – their need of the Father's provision of food, their need of His pardon for sin, or the need of His protection from temptation and from the evil one – He focuses their prayer very clearly on the Father Himself – on His reputation, His kingdom and His will.

This past Tuesday I was talking to Alan Linton at Unity Chapel, Bristol. Alan is a Vice President of the Prophetic Witness Movement International. Until recently the President was a Mr. William Freel – better known to some here this morning as Bill Freel. I have now been a Christian for half a century, having been converted at the end of October in 1960. And I remember that the following year there were some special meetings at Adamsdown with Mr. Freel. One evening he spoke on the so-called 'Lords' Prayer', and, when a certain teenager spoke to him after the meeting, Mr. Freel kindly wrote out his outline of that 'Prayer' for him and gave it to him. And I have that outline to this day – safe in one of my files at home.

Over the expressions which we have been covering up to this morning, Mr. Freel wrote: 'We come to God as a Son (Our Father which art in heaven) ... as a Saint (Hallowed be Thy name) ... as a Subject (Thy kingdom come) ... as a Servant (Thy will be done)' ... and 'as a Suppliant' (Give us this day)'.¹

And it is only now that the disciples are exhorted to make supplication for their own needs, whether spiritual or material. And, indeed, we cannot but be struck by the order which our Lord now follows. For, rather surprisingly perhaps, the plea 'give' comes before the plea 'forgive' ... that is, the petition for the meeting of the disciples' *physical* needs comes in advance of the petitions for the meeting of their *spiritual* needs.

Or maybe it is not that surprising. Long ago, one Bible commentator suggested – quite sensibly I think – 'Because our natural being is necessary to our spiritual well-being in this world, therefore, after the things of God's glory, kingdom, and will, we pray for the necessary supports ... of this present life'.¹

I have read that Samuel Johnson,² known best perhaps for his English dictionary, was once challenged about the amount of care he was taking over his stomach. Dr. Johnson replied, making much the same point as Matthew Henry, 'My dear sir, if I did not take good care of this place, I would not be able to take good care of anything else'.

And what an encouragement it is for us to know that, not only we, but God our Father cares that our stomachs do not go empty.

As you may have noticed earlier, the 'subtitle' which has been given to our study this morning is 'Needing our Father's provision'. Which raises, of course, the obvious question whether, in our affluent and prosperous society, where we all know very well where our food for today – and for as many days as we can foresee – is coming from ... whether in all honesty we do recognise – and really appreciate – 'our Father's provision'.

Now it is true, of course, that our Lord's immediate hearers were, for the most part, in a very different situation to our own – for not only was their lot in life far less comfortable than ours, but it was also far less certain and secure. For it was customary then – as it had been from Israel's earliest day – for men to be paid, not on a weekly or monthly basis, but on a daily basis. And, if illness or some other crisis prevented them from working, they had no sick pay to fall back on... and both they and their family went without. Clearly then it was easier for them than for us to feel a sense of dependence upon God.

And yet ... and yet they were fully aware that, in one very real sense, their 'daily bread' came as a result of the 'sweat of their brow' – that, in the words of the apostle Paul, if they didn't work then they wouldn't eat. Why therefore should they pray to their heavenly Father to give them that which they knew full well they needed to earn by their own industry? And most certainly our Lord was not teaching that such a prayer should take the place of honest toil. He was not in the business of encouraging indolence and laziness.

Why should then His disciples' look to God to 'give' them their daily – and necessary – food?

Obviously, our Lord was not leading them to expect any form of miraculous provision ... such as Moses and Israel enjoyed from the time they left Egypt until they reached and entered the Promised Land, with its corn ... or such as the prophet Elijah had enjoyed, whether courtesy of the God-commanded ravens, the unfailing barrel of meal, or breakfast provided (twice) by angelic hands.

Nor were they to expect God to satisfy their hunger by remarkable and exceptional means – as He has on numerous occasions since. I guess I have only to mention the name of George Müller – and possibly that of August Hermann Francke, whose own experiences some 130 years previously³ provided Mr. Müller with much of the inspiration for his work with orphans. At the end of the seventeenth century Mr. Francke founded an Orphan House and school at Halle in Germany. At several times of great need he received, in answer to special prayer, twenty, thirty, or fifty crowns. But I am particularly interested in one occasion of which he wrote as follows : ‘ ... all our provision was spent, but in addressing myself to the Lord, I found myself deeply affected with the fourth petition of the Lord’s prayer, ‘Give us this day our daily bread’; ... my thoughts were fixed especially on the words ‘this day,’ because on that day we had great need for it. While I was yet praying,⁴ a friend of mine came before my door in a coach, and brought the sum of four hundred crowns’.⁵

Some 130 years later, in early 1832,⁶ young George Müller began reading Mr. Francke’s biography and the seeds were sown for his own orphan work. Almost four years later, in the good man’s own words, ‘This evening I took tea at a sister’s house, where I found Francke’s life. I have’, he added, ‘frequently, for a long time, thought of labouring in a similar way ... May God make it plain!’ That was on the 20th of November 1835. In the next days entry – on today’s date (November 21st) in 1835, Mr. Müller wrote the now historic words, ‘To-day I have had it very much impressed on my heart, no longer merely to think about the establishment of an Orphan-House, but actually to set about it’.⁷

But I want to turn Mr. Müller’s clock back to another November – to November 1830. In his journal for that day he wrote concerning himself and his young wife, ‘Our money had been reduced to two and half pence; our bread was hardly enough for this day. I had several times brought our need before the Lord. After dinner, when I returned thanks, I asked Him to give us our daily bread, meaning literally that He would send us bread for the evening. Whilst I was praying,⁸ there was a knock at the door ... a poor sister came in, and brought us some of her dinner, and from another poor sister, 5 shillings. In the afternoon she also brought us a large loaf. Thus the Lord not only literally gave us bread, but also money’.⁹ It was another case, if I might borrow the title of one of Mr. Francke’s books, of ‘The Bountiful Hand of Heaven defraying the Expenses of Faith’.¹⁰

Oh yes, God has on many occasions, in response to the believing prayer of His people, seen fit to satisfy their hunger in the most remarkable and exceptional of ways. But it was not for such – any more than for dramatically miraculous ways, as with Moses and Elijah – that our Lord was asking His disciples to pray.

But why should they pray to their heavenly Father to give them that which they knew they would obtain by their own diligence and hard work? For the very simple reason – and they knew it – that God uses means both to fulfil His will and to answer His people’s prayers.

A little later – in verse 26 of this very chapter – the Lord Jesus points out that ‘the birds of the air ... neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns (that is, they make no long-term provision for their future), and yet your heavenly Father feeds them’. And He does. ‘Who provides for the raven its prey’, God asked Job, ‘when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?’¹¹ Well, we all know the answer to that one – as the psalmist insisted, it is ‘the Lord’ who ‘gives ... their food ... to the young ravens that call’.¹²

But that does not mean that he is going to drop the birds’ food either into their nests or into their beaks for them. He expects them to forage for it.

And, indeed, we know from our Bibles that our God not only provides for the birds of the air, but for the beasts of the earth, whether domestic – He ‘causes the grass to grow for the cattle’¹³ – or wild– ‘the young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God’.¹⁴

And, again, He not only feeds the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, but the fish of the sea. ‘Yonder’, the psalmist said, ‘is the great and wide sea, teeming with things innumerable, living things both small and great ... these all look to you, to give them their food in due season ... you open your hand, they are filled ...’.¹⁵

And yet we would have to say of each and all of these, as Jesus did of the birds, ‘are you (disciples) not of much more value than they’. For though the birds of the air, the beasts of the earth, and the fish of the sea are all ranked among God’s *creatures*, they are not, as we, reckoned among His *children*.

We understand well that God our Father works through means – through our circumstances as well as through our labours – to meet our material and earthly needs. How thankful we should each be that we live where we do (and not in one of those countries where, together, almost one billion under-nourished people are found this morning) – and that we live when we do (and not, for example, in England at the time of the Great Famine in the early 14th century, or even during the Great Depression of 80 years ago). Or we might well be crying out to God with a depth of meaning which, frankly, in my present circumstances I cannot, ‘Give us this day our daily bread’.

And yet let me remind you that the 'subtitle' given to our study this morning is 'Needing our Father's provision'. And we each acknowledge that, whatever means He sees fit to employ to meet our basic needs, in the final analysis, it is to God our Father's unfailing care that we look for the provision of our necessary food.¹⁶

And that expression 'our necessary food' sits well with the point made by many that our Lord taught His disciples to make known to God their 'needs' and not their 'greeds'. If you are prepared to overlook the violence done to the English language by that word 'greeds', the point is well made. For the Lord Jesus speaks here in terms of 'bread' – in all likelihood referring more generally to basic foodstuffs. Bring to God, He was saying, your requests for the necessities of life, not for its luxuries ... for 'bread' and not caviar. Pray that you may have something to eat every day,¹⁷ not that you might, as a certain rich men of whom He once spoke, fare sumptuously every day!¹⁸

True, we know, as our Lord said just before, that God the Father knows what we need before we ask Him.¹⁹ But we know also that He still wants us to ask, that we might thereby develop and deepen our sense of dependence upon Him. And so a humble prayer of creature-need is at one and the same time a trustful prayer of childlike-dependence.²⁰

And it is because we recognise that the provision for our basic bodily need ultimately 'comes down', as does everything that is good, from the Father, that we gladly give God thanks for our every meal. And here the Lord Jesus, as in all else, has left us the perfect example.

For, although, according to John 6, He knew that the five barley loaves He took into His hands in chapter 14 of our gospel had come directly from a young lad,²¹ He gave thanks *to God* for the bread before distributing it through His disciples to the multitude of '5,000 men, beside the women and children'.²²

And although He knew that the seven loaves in chapter 15 of our gospel came directly from His own disciples, He gave thanks for the bread *to God* before giving it back to His disciples for passing on to the multitude of '4,000 men, beside the women and children'.²³

And, again, although He knew that the bread in the Upper Room in chapter 26 of our gospel had been provided by Peter and John²⁴ as part of the preparation for the Passover meal, He gave thanks for it *to God* before giving it to His disciples as a token of His body about to be given for them.²⁵

And yet again, although He knew that the loaf in the village home at Emmaus had come from the store of the two disciples who lived there, He gave thanks for the bread *to God* before breaking it and giving it to them – with such dramatic results!²⁶

In each case, though our Lord knew well through whom God had supplied the bread, He was careful to give God thanks for it, in glad recognition that, when all was said and done, it represented His Father's provision for Him as well as for others.

And no one could tell Him – the Saviour – about the importance of having 'daily bread'. For, having once fasted for forty days and nights,²⁷ and on more than one occasion been so busy that He had no opportunity to eat,²⁸ He knew well what it was to be hungry – whether at the commencement of His public ministry in the wilderness of Judea in chapter 4,²⁹ or at the close of that ministry on the way into Jerusalem in chapter 21.³⁰

And how thankful *we too* should be for the daily provision which our Father makes for *us*.

When writing to the churches at Rome, the apostle Paul had occasion to address two factions there who disagreed strongly over which food Christians could and should eat. 'He who eats (who freely eats *all* kinds of meat, that is), eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks', Paul wrote in verse 6 of chapter 14, 'and he who does not eat (who avoids, that is, certain meats which³¹ he believes are still off God's menu), to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks'. The evidence that both parties ate 'to the Lord' and to the glory of God was seen in their both giving God thanks – in the context, whether they are sitting down to a sirloin steak or to a vegetarian salad.

Make no mistake, our very lives depend on the daily provision which God the Father makes for us. And, as Christians, we owe Him at least our thanks. And by that I do not mean simply muttering a few unthinking and monotonous words before tucking into our meal.

At a much later period of his life, Paul wrote to Timothy concerning (this time) demonically-deluded false teachers who would, he said, maintain that certain foods were taboo, demanding that believers abstain from them. Listen to Paul's words. These are 'foods', he said, 'which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving'.³²

And perhaps some of us would do well expanding our thanksgiving just a little. I was affected some time ago by some words I came across from an American author and preacher by the name of Lewis Smedes. Even though the man was devoted to the Lord, he suffered badly at times from deep depression. Indeed, at one point he sank so low

that he stopped preaching altogether. But, as he put it, God lifted him up from his black pit. Later he wrote, and let me quote his own words, 'I have not been depressed since that day, though I must ... tell you that God ... comes to me each morning and offers me a 20 milligram capsule of Prozac. He clears away the garbage that accumulates in the canal of my brain overnight and gives me a chance to get a fresh morning start'. And then came the words which hit me the hardest, 'I swallow every capsule', Mr. Smedes wrote, 'with gratitude to God'.³³

Was taking Prozac a sign of weak faith, do you think? Do you not agree with brother Smedes that his Prozac wasn't a substitute for God but His daily gift?

And I realized that not once when I had given thanks with Linda for our breakfast and for whatever sleep we had enjoyed the night before ... not once had I thought to give thanks to my Father for the medication which kept her going and helped me on my way. Guess what, not a morning passes now but that we bow our heads to offer our thanks for food, rest ... and our medication.

How easy it is to accept gladly the benefits which come from the careful use of painkillers, from sleeping tablets, possibly from anti-depressants and even more critical treatments such as radiotherapy ... or whatever – and never think of expressing our gratitude to the One in heaven without whose direction the medical world would have lacked the wisdom and skill to make such help available to us.

And Paul, I note, practised what he taught. Because sometime between his letter to Rome and his letter to Timothy he suffered a shipwreck at Malta. Luke tells us that the day before the ship ran aground, and after those on board had eaten no proper meal for two whole weeks, 'Paul urged them all to take some food', adding, 'when he (Paul) had said this, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat'.³⁴

And, inasmuch as every day in one sense we each 'live hand to mouth' – by which I mean our Father's hand and our own mouth – we are honour bound to thank Him for 'our daily bread' – for the provision which He faithfully makes to meet our need.

I close with a (possibly true) story I came across some time ago.

The story runs that a Christian farmer spent a day in a large city. Entering the restaurant for his noon meal, he found a table near a group of young men. When his meal was served, he quietly, with bowed head, gave thanks for the food before him. The young men, observing this, thought they would ridicule and embarrass the old gentleman. One called out in a loud voice: 'Hey farmer, does everyone do that where you live?' The old man looked at the ... youth and calmly said: 'No, son, the pigs don't'.³⁵

So next time you sit down to a nice meal, be careful not to make a pig of yourself!

Let us remember this morning that we each need our Father's provision ... and let us remember to thank Him for it.

Footnotes

¹ Matthew Henry on Matthew 6. 9-15.

² 1709-1784.

³ August Hermann Francke (March 22, 1663 – June 8, 1727). Mr Francke's orphan work began in the late 1600s. In 1698 he had 100 orphans under his charge.

⁴ See Isaiah 65. 24, and compare the quotation from George Müller linked to note 8 below.

⁵ S. B. Shaw, *Touching Incidents and Remarkable Answers to Prayer*.

⁶ February 1832 to be precise.

⁷ *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings With George Müller – First Part*, page 143.

⁸ See note 4 above.

⁹ *Ibid.*, page 81.

¹⁰ An account of his orphanage, entitled *Segensvolle Fußstapfen*, (1709), which subsequently passed through several editions, has also been partially translated, under the title 'The bountiful Hand of Heaven defraying the Expenses of Faith'.

¹¹ Job 38. 41.

¹² Psa. 147. 9.

¹³ Psa. 104. 14.

¹⁴ Psa. 104. 21.

¹⁵ Psa. 104. 25-28.

¹⁶ And, indeed, it is a fact that the expression translated 'our daily bread' in my text could well be – and, quite possibly, should be – rendered 'our needful ... our necessary bread' ... the bread, that is, which is necessary for our very existence. See, for example, Kittel's *TDNT*, volume II, page 599: 'there can be little doubt that its force is adequately brought out in the rendering, "The bread which we need, give us today"'. Also "our necessary (or sufficient) bread" has the best claim to be received, as in fact it is, in the oldest known version, the Peschito Syriac', William Kelly, *Thoughts on the Lord's Prayer*, at :

<http://www.stempublishing.com/authors/kelly/7subjects/LORDSPRA.html>.

¹⁷ Luke 11. 3.

¹⁸ Luke 16. 19.

¹⁹ Matt. 6. 8.

²⁰ And such is the Father's tender care and abundant provision that, in asking for bread, the disciples could have absolute confidence that, as Jesus assured them a little later, their 'Father who is in heaven' would no more give them a stone instead of bread than would any of them to son who asked the same of him; Matt. 7. 9-11; cf. Luke 11. 11-13.

²¹ John 6. 9.

²² Matt. 14. 19; John 6. 11.

²³ Matt. 15. 34-38.

²⁴ Luke 22. 8.

²⁵ Matt. 26. 26.

²⁶ Luke 24. 28-31.

²⁷ Matt. 4. 2.

²⁸ Mark 3. 20; 6. 31.

²⁹ Matt. 4. 4. 1.

³⁰ Matt. 21. 18. It is no wonder therefore that, knowing hunger as He did, before He acted to satisfy the multitude's hunger in chapter 15, He 'called His disciples to Him and said, "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat; and I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way"'.
³¹ In accordance with the Old Testament dietary laws.

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³² 1 Tim. 4. 3-5. Paul concluded, 'for it is sanctified (set apart for our use and benefit) by the word of God (which has pronounced all foods now clean) and prayer (when we lift our hearts to God in thanksgiving for it)' – that is, by both His word to us and by ours to Him.

³³ Quoted in John Ortberg, *God is closer than you think*, pages 161-162.

³⁴ Acts 27. 33-35.

³⁵ The full story runs, "Clyde Murdock tells of a Christian farmer who was spending a day in a large city. Entering the restaurant for his noon meal, he found a table near a group of young men. When his meal was served, he quietly, with bowed head, gave thanks for the food before him. The young men, observing this, thought they would ridicule and embarrass the old gentleman. One called out in a loud voice: 'Hey farmer, does everyone do that where you live?' The old man looked at the callow youth and calmly said: 'No, son, the pigs don't'."

The Prairie Overcomer, October 1987, p. 36. Quoted on <http://www.lilesnet.com/thanksgiving/quotes/>.