

The Lord's Prayer...

*For What
Do We Pray?*

Matthew 6:11-14

Image by Mike Labrum

Matthew 6:11-13

11 Give us today our daily bread.

**12 And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

**13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'**

Today we begin our third week of our study into The Lord's Prayer. I do hope you are finding your little red notebooks handy and that you are using them.

If you remember, the first week we talked about "How to Pray." About how God expects us to come into intimate conversations in our closet. If you have never seen the movie "The War Room," I highly recommend it. It presents a great picture of how God works through this process of conversation with us, of having intimate conversations regarding ourselves, our families, our friends, our hardships, our blessings and our everyday interactions with the world around us.

The second week, we discussed "To Whom Do We Pray?" and we learned about how the words "Our Father" give us insight into how Jesus teaches us to pray; that the "Our" in "Our Father" show us that we are not praying alone but as a community of believers. That God is the Father of each of us and that the role of Father is a reference to a role where God is our Protector, Provider and head of our spiritual family. We also discussed the nature of heaven and how God is not part of His own creation, that He is the Artist to creation, the Author and Finisher of all things. We also discussed how God's perspective is different from our own since He resides outside of the creation looking in while we are inside the creation looking out. We took a look at how God built a bridge between Himself and us by bringing Christ into the world to live and die for us creating a path that

allows us to have a personal relationship with our creator through the cleansing of our sins by the blood Jesus Christ.

We then discussed the nature of Hallowed and what it means to be able to stand in the presence of God on Holy ground and how we all are one in our hope and prayer that God's Kingdom will become a part of what we know and love, that we need to do our part to bring God's Kingdom to the people around us.

Today, we find that Jesus gets down to the nuts and bolts of just what we are to pray for. Let's read that scripture again.

11 Give us today our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from the evil one.'

We can easily break these three verses down into items for discussion because each one covers a different aspect of our lives. But remember that Jesus gave us this prayer as a template, a guideline. We will find that there is meaning in each verse that goes beyond what is being spoken. When we seek the meaning behind what Jesus is telling us, we understand how all of our petitions can be covered under this template.

“Give us today our daily bread” – Why is this one first? Why does Jesus start out with our daily bread, our nourishment rather than say, forgive us our sins? Isn’t forgiveness of our sins more important than daily nourishment?

I truly believe that Jesus is saying more here than we are giving him credit for. We can break daily bread down into two parts and both parts need to be expressed.

1. Luke 12:29-31

29 And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it.

30 For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them.

31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

You all know that passage of scripture well. It tells us that God is going to take care of us. He will provide for our needs. So, if He is going to provide for our needs, why do we need to pray for them? Why ask Him to “Give us our daily Bread?” Do you remember these words that come right before The Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6?

7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

We ask Him so that we can be on the same page, so that He knows that we know what we are asking for. It is how the conversation takes place. And we know in our hearts that God already knows what we need in our lives. He will also protect us from things that we think we need but He knows we don't really need in our lives.

Too often we bring God our solutions rather than our needs. "God, please give me a million dollars and all my problems will be worked out." "God, if you will only send me a good wife or husband, everything will work itself out." God, if you will only put the right Doctor, Lawyer, Preacher in my life, then everything will work out."

What we should be praying is "God I have this obstacle in my life. Would you please bless me with your solution, because I know that you know what is best for me." "Father, please provide me my daily bread."

- 2. The second part of my daily bread is a little more spiritual and less physical in nature. A case can be made that Jesus is talking about sustenance of the spirit. In other words, "Father, please feed me today through your word; through the people that you have placed in my life to give me wisdom, to help me seek answers to the questions that you see will help me grow as a believer and as your child. Please help me follow the example Christ set by nourishing my soul."**

I see that this passage can mean both, but either way, you are being reliant on God giving you what you need to be a child of His in this world. And He gives it so graciously. We just need to acknowledge that He is the giver and we are the receiver; that He is true to His word and we are simply the blessed recipients.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors - There is an assumption in this verse, and it does have a tendency to get us into trouble. We, as humans, can be pretty selfish. All too often we focus on the first part of this verse and think of the second part as optional. But that really isn't the case, and we know it. If we are wanting God to forgive us our sins, He truly expects to see enough change in our lives that we will forgive those who sin against us.

The 14th and 15th verse in the 6th chapter of Matthew comes right after The Lord's Prayer and are considered to be separate. But I have warned you in the past about taking scripture out of context. So, let's read Matthew 6:14 &15.

14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

This is not a conditional statement. It just reads that way. When Jesus becomes the focal point of your life, when you allow Him to change you into a new

creature, these verses are proof of that change. Remember Matthew 7:20?

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

What fruits? The fruits of change. The fruits of righteousness. The fruits of grace. The fruits of mercy. The fruits of Thanksgiving. It is so easy for us, as humans, to hang on to anger, animosity, revenge and judgement. But these things are not of God and they only hurt us. They don't hurt the person that we are sitting in judgement over. We, as children of our Heavenly Father, have got to let it go. We all know people in our lives who have done some pretty monstrous things. I have seen how those who cannot find forgiveness in their hearts for the people are eventually eaten up by their anger and desire for revenge.

If we are children of our Heavenly Father, then we have the capacity to let it go. He will provide all that we need. The fruit will be that we will find ourselves able to forgive those who have hurt us and those around us. We can do this because we accept that God has shown grace to us through the life and blood of His son. It is through this grace that we are not only forgiven but also acquire the ability, courage and grace to forgive those who sin against us.

Jesus believed this so much He made it an integral part of this prayer model.

“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”, “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.” No matter how you translate it, the

meaning is still there. Forgiveness needs to become a basic part of our nature, because it is part of the basic nature of our Lord and Savior. Forgiveness needs to be our “go to” response when we are wronged, rather than anger, animosity, revenge or judgement. And it cannot be based on reciprocation. We give forgiveness with no strings or compensation expected, just as it is with our Lord . Forgiveness has to become our default position if we wish to follow the model of life that Jesus provides us with.

**13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'**

There are many references to this passage. I found so many translations and paraphrases of this text. Remember that I told you that Jesus spoke Aramaic and that The Lord's Prayer is translated from Aramaic into Greek. I even found several references where the prayer was translated from Greek back into Aramaic which totally distorted what Jesus was trying to say. Most scholars still agree that the King James translation is the most accurate in this case. **“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”** But we find ourselves saying that this has got to be incorrect because God would never lead us into temptation. After all, in the 1st chapter of the book of James we read in the 13th verse **“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:”** That sounds very much like it is in direct

contradiction to what we read in The Lord's Prayer, but it really isn't and we will talk about why that is.

I found too many theologians trying to monkey with the way Jesus says what He says in order to get it to align with a more practical theology. But that is not how theology works. We don't put our words into the mouth of Jesus in order to make it fit our needs. When we do that, we are recreating God in our own image which is not a position we want to find ourselves when we stand before our creator.

I found a sermon by Charles Spurgeon that he wrote in 1863 on the subject of "Lead Us Not Into Temptation", where he takes the theologians of his day to task when they try to make this passage into something more palatable. It's a great sermon and if I had an hour to share it with you, I would. Still, there are some things I was able to glean from that sermon that we can explore. I am no fool to be suffered because I choose to sit at the feet of wise men and learn from them.

I want to say that most Christians are not wanting to get deep into the theology of interpreting scripture. Doing so can be very complicated and confusing. But still, if we are going to recite a passage of scripture every week, making it integral to our worship, do we not believe that we should understand what Jesus is trying to say? Shouldn't we go beyond the words down to the root of the meaning of those words. Shouldn't we commit ourselves to the pursuit of studying the scripture to give us a firm foundation on which to build our faith? Shouldn't

every Christian listen and glean the spirit of what Jesus is trying to teach us? Shouldn't we take time to go beyond reciting scripture and take the next step of integrating that scripture into our walk with God on a daily basis? In this particular case, doing so can be mind-altering. It can be a game changer in our belief system. It can impress on upon us the importance of what Jesus is trying to tell us. This is so much more than a prayer. It is life sustaining. It takes us from speaking TO God to having a conversation WITH God.

So, what is Jesus saying when He says, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil?" We have to break this down a little farther by looking at not only what He is saying but also what He is not saying. As we talk about this, we need to see the precipice on which this passage sits. Christ is not saying "Lead us not TO temptation" but lead us not INTO temptation. God will never push us into temptation. To do so would make Him complicit in our sin, which is not possible. But He can allow us to be delivered to the edge of temptation and by doing so, use that deliverance to build character and fortitude. Think of a fire. You feel the heat before you get burned and you learn from that fact. By feeling the heat, you become aware enough of the fire and you can avoid getting burned. It isn't so much of a test as it is a learning experience; a means of development.

When I hear these words, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," what I sense Christ is saying here is that we should expect God to allow us to be

lead up to the fire, allow us feel the heat of the flame, but keep us from entering that fire. Deliver us from the fire before we get burned. Braise us and make us stronger so that we may push ourselves back from the fire when the time comes.

Just like James says, God will never tempt you. It just isn't possible. But He can use the heat of temptation to make us stronger and teach us new ways of avoiding temptations when they are presented to us. God did not tempt Job, but He allowed Job to be tempted. God did not tempt Jesus, but He did allow Jesus to be tempted. God led neither one into temptation but allowed both to feel the heat of temptation. To be burnished by temptation is to be made stronger to stand against future temptations. So, we pray that God will burnish us and prepare us to stand against temptation, but not allow us to succumb to temptation.

But we also have to remember that God still allows us to make that final choice. We have the right to jump into the fires of temptation, but it is not the will of God in our lives. He truly wants to build up our resistance so that we can avoid temptation and by doing so, be an example to others in our lives.

So, to bring everything together, when we talk to God about the needs in our lives, we are acknowledging that God already knows those needs. By our petitions, God know that we understand what our needs are, and that the

fulfillment of those needs are how God is speaking into our lives and molding us into the children that He needs us to be. We understand that God is meeting both our physical and spiritual needs. We also talked about forgiveness and that as children of our Heavenly Father, we are expected to follow the example of Christ in this world by forgiving others unconditionally. Lastly, we talk about how God may allow us to be led to the edge of temptation, but that His will for us by doing so is that we learn to resist that temptation and become stronger and more mature Christians.

Next week we will be discussing the doxology of the Lord's Prayer, which is that passage of The Lord's Prayer that we do not find in our Bibles but still recite during worship. God bless you all as we continue in our study.

Amen