

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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GIVE US OUR DAILY BREAD (part one)

Matthew 6:11

We will continue today our study of the Lord's Prayer in the gospel of Matthew. And we will concentrate on v. 11 of Matthew 6. In Matthew 6:11, Jesus asks us to pray this prayer. This is what we read from the New King James Version.

Mathew 6:11. Give us this day our daily bread.

Give us this day our daily bread. The meaning of this prayer seems to be pretty simple. We are asking God to provide our food everyday so that in doing so, we are learning to trust our heavenly Father to meet our physical needs. There doesn't seem to be much to expound here. But when you know how rich are Jesus' words everywhere in His teaching, you will not be satisfied with this rather superficial understanding of this verse. In fact, this verse is so rich in meaning that I felt that one lesson on that verse is not enough if I want to do justice to the teaching of Jesus. So you will hear two lessons on Matthew 6:11.

Why praying for bread?

Jesus asks us to pray to God, *Give us this day our daily bread*. What is there that we can say? Is there more to understand that we are asking God to supply our daily needs? In many commentaries, you read that the society in Jesus' time depended a lot on agriculture. Workers were paid on a daily basis, at the end of their day of work. If it was not a good day to work on the field, you might end up with no salary at the end of the day. And if you have no income, you have no money to buy your food. And therefore, the prayer, *Give us this day our daily bread*, was a very relevant one for the people of that time.

But what about us? Look at your pantry. Look at your freezer. You have enough food there for the next several days, and perhaps for some, for several weeks or even several months. And even if you are those who don't cook, just look at your bank account. You can buy food anytime, anywhere. What do you mean, that I should pray to God, *Give us this day our daily bread*? Or maybe this prayer applies to those who live by faith with no fix salary. But if you have a job that gives you a regular income, like most of us, then perhaps, we should not pray that prayer.

The structure of the Lord's Prayer

What is the Lord Jesus saying here? How are we to understand His words? First of all, I would like you to notice the overall structure of the Lord's Prayer. It starts out with the statement, *Our Father in heaven*. Then there follow seven petitions, seven being a perfect number in the Bible. The

petition, *Give us this day our daily bread*, ranks as the fourth of the seven. That means to say that right in the middle of the seven petitions, we find the fourth one, *Give us our daily bread*.

When you look at the other six, you notice that they all have to do with spiritual concepts. Holiness, the kingdom of God, the will of God, heaven, forgiveness of our sins, temptation to sin, deliverance from the evil one. To say that the fourth petition is concerned only with bread for the body, with our own material necessities, does not fit in too well with the strong spiritual content of all the other petitions found in the Lord's Prayer.

Salvation: the central theme

And what is more, if you continue to meditate on these six petitions, you begin to realize that there is an underlying theme. You notice that every single one of them is concerned with one main thing. What is that theme? Each of the petitions is concerned with the subject of salvation, with the salvation of God to us. *Hallowed be Your name* means 'Reveal Yourself to the world that You are holy in order to save mankind.' God's salvation comes when the kingdom of God comes. And the kingdom of God means that His will is done in our lives as it is right now in heaven. We are saved when God forgives us our debts, our sins. And when we say, *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one*, we are asking God for spiritual protection. We are praying that God preserves our salvation in spite of the attacks of the devil to make us fall away.

We see then that each of these petitions is concerned with God's salvation. Once we see this beautiful structure of the Lord's Prayer, we begin to realize that the middle one must also be concerned with salvation, and not merely with the supply of our daily food. We must therefore conclude that the fourth petition, *Give us our daily bread*, must also be concerned with salvation. Now the challenge is to demonstrate that this conclusion is right because we haven't proved anything yet.

The bread for the coming day

The key word to understand today's passage is to understand the meaning of the word 'bread', *Give us today our daily bread*. As I have just said, it doesn't seem likely that Jesus is simply talking about the physical food that our body needs. Now, this word 'bread' is preceded by another important word. And it is the word 'daily', daily bread. This word 'daily' is not necessarily the preferred translation of the original text. In some English versions, take for example the RSV or the NASV, you will find in little words in the margin down below, the comment that it can also be translated by 'the coming day.' It is the bread for the coming day. So it is not necessarily the bread for today that we are praying for, but the bread for the coming day.

Without going into all the linguistic details of this, suffice is to say that most Bible scholars prefer the second translation, the bread for the coming day. This might come as a surprise to you because we are used to say, *our daily bread*. But keep in mind that this is not necessarily the best translation. For Bible scholars, it is better to talk about the bread for the coming day.

Now, we are praying for bread for the coming day. This is important to notice and to distinguish between today and tomorrow, the coming day. In the Bible, today is the present age, the present time of salvation. The coming day is the coming age, the new day of salvation. Let me clarify that from the Word of God. Hebrews 4 gives us precisely that picture. Let me read from Hebrews 4, starting from v. 4 to 10.

Hebrews 4:4. For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works";

5 and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest."

6 *Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience,*
7 *again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as it has been said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."*
8 *For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day.*
9 *There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.*
10 *For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.*

Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. The writer to the Hebrews gives a stern warning to the Christians of his church. He quotes from Psalm 95 and says that the word 'today' was used by David many hundred years after the hardening of the hearts of the Israelites in the wilderness. From this observation, he concludes that these words of God have continual validity. They are just as valid today as they were in the days of David or in the days of the nation of Israel in the wilderness. This allows the writer to the Hebrews to apply this warning to the Christians of his time. And this warning is for us, today, as well.

'While it is still today, do not harden your hearts.' What do we mean by 'today'? 'Today' means this present time. This day of salvation that is granted by God, in His grace, to man.

But why should we take hold of this warning? The writer to the Hebrews tells us. So that we may enter into the coming day. Which day? The new day, the Sabbath, the day of rest. God has yet a future rest for His people. Remember v. 9: *There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God.* The Sabbath is the day of rest, when there is no more turmoil, when there shall be no suffering, when the burdens of sin shall be no more. That's the picture of the Sabbath. The day of rest is a rest from the burdens, the troubles, the toils of sins. So today we repent so that we may enter into the coming day, into God's ultimate and perfect rest.

Jesus, our spiritual bread

Now, what exactly does all this mean for us? Put simply, it means that 'bread', here in the Lord's Prayer, refers to Jesus Himself as the living bread. So we are not merely talking about a physical bread, but about a spiritual bread. In the context of the Lord's Prayer, which is concerned with salvation, the prayer is for a spiritual food, for the spiritual bread, that gives us salvation.

This is a common use of the word 'bread' in the teaching of the Lord Jesus, particularly in the gospel of John. If you read John 6, you will see this set forth in a beautiful way. Jesus says, 'I am the bread of life. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. He who eats of Me, of this spiritual bread, will live forever.' Jesus is the bread of life. He is the bread of salvation. If we pray for physical bread and physical food, how much more important is it to pray also for the bread of life. That is the bread that Jesus is talking about in the Lord's Prayer.

Give us today our bread for the coming day. We see then that this whole prayer is concerned with salvation. And therefore this central prayer could be no exception. Not only could there be no exception, but being the central petition, the fourth of the prayer, it must certainly be concerned above all with salvation. And we find that we are not disappointed when we examine it whether structurally, or linguistically or exegetically. In every respect, we find that Jesus is talking about a spiritual food, a spiritual bread and this spiritual bread being Himself. 'I am the bread of life and he who eats of Me shall have eternal life.' In other words, you take of this bread and you will be saved. You will receive salvation. Now we begin to understand. You see now why I say that the petition to give us our daily bread is concerned with salvation, like the rest of the Lord's Prayer.

The Sabbath day bread

Let me tell you more about the richness of this verse. If you have followed me so far, you will understand that the prayer is to *give us **today** the bread for the coming day*, the bread of God's kingdom, the bread of the new Sabbath.

Now, how can we pray like this, 'Give us today, the bread for the coming day?' When Jesus, in John 6, talked about Himself being the bread of life, it was in contrast with the manna that the Jews ate in the wilderness. He said to the Jews who were talking to Him, 'Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they are dead... but you eat of this living bread and you will live forever.'

This takes us back into the OT about the manna. In Exodus 16, we read about this manna, this bread which came down from heaven and which fed the Israelites for so many years in the wilderness. They were told to gather the manna on a daily basis. They could not take more than what they needed for the day. That was not a problem for the first six days of the week. But what about the seventh day, the Sabbath day? Because on a Sabbath day, you are not supposed to work. What are you going to eat if you are not allowed to gather food on that day? Well, don't worry. God supplied the manna for the first six days. He will also give you the food that you need for the seventh day. What God did was something wonderful. He supplied the food for the Sabbath day, the seventh day, on the sixth day. He supplied the bread for the coming day, today. Do you begin to understand?

The Sabbath day bread is supplied on the sixth day. That was the only time in the week you could collect two days worth of bread in one. On no other day could you collect bread for two days. If you try to do it, it will go bad the next day. The manna could not be kept and had to be eaten the same day that it was collected. The only exception was for the Sabbath day. God worked in such a way that only on the sixth day, they could have bread for the coming day. That's the only time they could have two days bread. The Sabbath day bread, they had it the day before.

Now the whole thing becomes clear for us. We come to see the light of the Lord's teaching when we come to understand what the Sabbath means. The Sabbath is a day of rest, the rest from sin. It is the freedom from being heavy laden, laden from the burden of sin.

The beauty of the Lord's teaching is this. We live today in the wilderness of this world, in the spiritual wilderness. And if we are to live spiritually, we need that God constantly supplies to us the spiritual food that we must have in Christ. No one can live spiritually without that spiritual food from heaven. Just as the Israelites depended on the manna to live physically, we depend on Jesus, the bread of life, to live spiritually. It is not a question of eating once that spiritual food, in the past, to have eternal life. We need constantly to depend upon that spiritual bread to sustain our spiritual life.

From the sixth day to the seventh day

So we are praying to God, 'Give us today our bread for the coming day.' There is another biblical truth about this. Since Jesus came 2000 years ago, we are living today in the last age of human history. Hebrews 1:2 says that God ... *has in these **last days** spoken to us by His Son...* This last age of human history is known as 'the age of grace' because of the way God deals with men. We are today in the sixth day of the human history. The Bible tells us that we are in the last days, just before the Sabbath day, just before the kingdom of God comes in its fullness.

Your will be done on earth as in heaven. Remember this. The will of God will be done on earth as it is now in heaven. Some people ask, 'If God is God, why doesn't He concern Himself with the problems of this world?' Well, if you know God, you will learn that He is concerning Himself with the problems of this world. He is dealing with the very fundamental problem of this world, namely sin. At the very root of the problem of this world is sin, and God is dealing with that problem right now.

God hasn't finished with this world yet. Because His kingdom is going to be established in this world. His will is going to be done on earth in such a way as it is in heaven. That's the glory of the gospel. The gospel is no escapism. It doesn't run away from the problems of this world. It faces the problems fully and squarely. It deals with those problems in the most practical way, and in the only way they can be properly dealt with. And by the grace of God, we shall enter into that day when sin and suffering will cease to exist.

Having today the bread the for the coming day

Finally, we can see this also. Although we are in the last age of human history, we are able to experience today, the power of the kingdom that is to come. That's what Hebrews 6 tells us. Hebrews 6:5 says that the believer is someone who *has tasted ... the powers of the age to come*. Tomorrow's bread, we can have it today. That's the point. We can experience today the power of the age to come. We experience today the saving presence and power of Christ, the living bread, in our lives.

Eternal life is not something that we are going to have only when we die. Eternal life is something we have now. The bread for the coming day, we have it today. This is not a promise that is so far away that you wonder whether it is true or not. It is not a question of saying, 'Well, tomorrow you will have it, but you can't have it today.' God works the other way around. What He promises for tomorrow, He gives it today. The seventh day bread, we have it today, on the sixth day, in these last days.

O, so wonderful is the teaching of the Lord Jesus. It is so characteristic of Him to compress so much riches in the scope of a few words. He never says anything that is trivial. Everything that He says has great depth. Now we understand that strange sentence which says that the bread for the coming day, give us today.

Do you have this bread? If not, I urge you to have it. Try it. Experience it. Feed upon that bread and see if it gives you life. That is the plain and powerful challenge of the Word of God.