

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 (2)

Matthew 6:11

In our previous lesson, you will remember that we were studying the words of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 6:11 where He said, *Give us this day our daily bread*. I pointed out to you that a better translation, according to most Bible scholars today, is to say, *Give us this day our bread for the coming day*.

And we looked at the meaning of the word ‘bread’ in the Lord’s Prayer. We discovered that it doesn’t merely refer to the physical bread that our body needs. The Lord Jesus was talking also about the spiritual bread that our soul needs. And we saw that this bread is Jesus Himself. ‘I am the bread of life’, He says in John 6, ‘He who eats of Me shall have eternal life.’ So the petition is for a spiritual bread that gives us salvation. And I also pointed out to you that salvation is not a matter of eating that spiritual food once in the past. Salvation, eternal life, is a matter of depending constantly upon that spiritual bread to sustain our spiritual life.

Understanding the picture of the bread

The last time, I expounded Matthew 6:11 with an emphasis on its theological meaning. Today I will take the same verse, but this time with an emphasis on its practical application. *Give us this day our bread for the coming day*. What is the direct implication of this verse for us in our daily life? That will be the focus of our lesson today.

When Jesus says that He is the living bread, He is of course using picture language to reveal to us some spiritual truths. And therefore it is important for us to know what is being said by this particular picture. Clearly, a human being is not a piece of bread that you can eat. What are the important spiritual truths that this picture of bread is designed to convey to us?

A vital necessity

First of all, by using the expression the ‘bread from heaven’ to refer to Himself in John 6, Jesus connects us to the Israelites in the wilderness. And comparing this picture of Jesus as the living bread with the manna of the OT has important elements of teaching for us.

We are like the people of Israel in the wilderness. We, as Christians, are pictured by them. In that sense, they are a type for us. As Paul says in 1Corinthians 10, those things that we read in the OT were written for us, for our sake, as examples. The OT was written not just for us to read as a story, but to teach us important spiritual lessons today. And one lesson that we learn is that we are the Israel of God today. As the people of God, we are a chosen nation, as Peter says in 1Peter. God has chosen

us out of this world, out of Egypt, and He is leading us on towards the land of promise. We are now passing through the wilderness of this world. So we have been saved out of Egypt, out of the world, and we are moving on through the wilderness.

As we travel through the wilderness of this world, like the Israelites, we have to depend upon the food from heaven to continue to live spiritually. We cannot live spiritually in the wilderness of this world without every day receiving the bread from heaven anymore than the Israelites could survive without the manna. God has to supply constantly to us the spiritual food that we have in Christ. So as our body depends upon food for sustenance, we cannot live spiritually without Jesus as our spiritual bread. It is not question of having more or less food. It is a question of life and death. 'I am the bread of life. Without Me, you cannot live.' That is what the picture of the bread is intended to convey to us.

The constant need for bread

Now it indicates also that not only it is important to us for life, but that it never ceases to be important for us in life. Some things are very important for our life, and without it, you might die. Take for example certain medicine that you need at a particular time. You can die from a pneumonia, a lung infection, if it is not treated properly. You will need to take an antibiotic to get well. But once you are cured, you don't need the medicine anymore.

Some Christians treat Jesus as though He were some kind of medicine, that you need just to cure that ill, in some moments of their lives. And once they feel better, bye-bye Jesus, just as you say bye-bye to the doctor once you are well. You don't need him anymore. Well, you may not need medicine anymore, but you never cease to need bread.

So not only is Jesus important to us for life, but He never ceases to be important for us. No one can have life apart from Jesus. You only have eternal life in Jesus. ... *the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 6:23). We will forever, through all eternity, need Jesus. There will never come a day, when I am in heaven and I don't need Jesus anymore. And I am glad that it is like that because I love Him and I don't want to live apart from Jesus. I want to be in fellowship with Jesus forever. I want to feed constantly upon that bread of life.

A desire for bread

There is another lesson that we can derive from this picture of the bread. The manna that came in the wilderness, it didn't go directly into the mouths of the people. They had to collect it everyday and eat it. Remember that. To feed upon the bread of life involves your cooperation. God is not going to take His bread and stuff it down your throat. He respects us too much to do anything like that. You have to take it yourself if you are going to benefit from it. The bread doesn't push itself at you. You have to take it.

So we find the same thing too that Jesus never forces Himself upon people. Remember the story on the road to Emmaus. Two disciples were walking, talking about Jesus. And Jesus appeared to them and walked with them. When they reached the village, Jesus told them that He had to go farther. But the disciples insisted that He has a meal with them. They said, 'Please, stay. Come and have supper with us.' Finally, Jesus accepted to stay. You see, Jesus never forces Himself upon somebody else. If you don't invite Him, He will just move on. He never crams Himself down on the people's throat. We don't harass people with the gospel. We don't grind people's face in the gospel.

It is the spiritual drawing power of Christ that makes people desiring to receive Him. *When I am lifted up, I will draw all men to Myself* (John 12:32). And the more you know Jesus, the more you find Him attractive. So like bread, we must receive Him if we are going to benefit Him.

Receiving Jesus eagerly

But it is not just receiving Jesus. It is also how you receive Him that matters. In the parable of the sower, Jesus says that it is not just that you hear, but how you hear that matters. Some hear the Word of God, and it does nothing to them. Others hear the Word of God and they begin to grow spiritually and to become fruitful. Some became more fruitful than others. All the soils received the same seed, i.e. the Word of God, but they received it in a different way. So it is not just a question of receiving, but how you receive.

The bread, if it is going to benefit you, you don't just take it and put it in a bag. You have to eat it if it is going to benefit you. You've got to have it in your stomach, in the center of your body, in the very center of your being.

In the same way, if Jesus is going to benefit you, you don't just have a little taste of the spiritual bread with your lips. That might just be an intellectual acceptance of Jesus. And you feel that you are a Christian because you do all these external things. That's not how it works. It is a matter of eating, of taking the food right into your innermost being. What matters is to receive Jesus into the innermost part of our soul. He has to be in the center of our being. If you have Him in the periphery of your existence, you might just be using Jesus as a badge to claim that you are a Christian. But not until He is in the center of your person, in the center of your life, is He going to benefit you.

Coming back to the story of the disciples on the Emmaus road, we are told that as they were having supper with Jesus, Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it. He broke the bread and gave it to the disciples. Because you see, in order to eat the bread, the bread has to be broken. I cannot take a loaf of bread and swallow it like that. I cannot eat the bread without breaking it apart. It has to come in small pieces before it can feed me. In the same way, the Lord Jesus, the spiritual bread, was broken upon the cross in order to set us free from the bondage of sin. At the communion, Jesus took bread and He broke it. And He said to His disciples, *Take, eat; this (bread) is My body*. His body was broken on the cross. His life was broken for us in order that we may be fed, in order to feed the world. And so He says in John 6:51: ... *The bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world*. Do you see how rich is this picture of the bread?

Spiritual appetite

Now, I want to deal with another subject that is very much related to our passage. And it is the topic of spiritual appetite. You cannot really talk about eating without also talking about appetite. And spiritual food involves spiritual appetite. As I mentioned earlier, it is not a question that you made a profession of faith in Jesus once in the past, and then your need for Jesus disappears. It is not a question of feeding once, but feeding constantly upon that bread of life. And in order to feed constantly, we must have spiritual appetite.

Let me put this question before you. How much do you crave for spiritual food? How much do you crave for the things of God? Not every Christian has the same desire for food. Not every Christian has the same level of interest in spiritual things. Some Christians have almost an unceasing hunger for food. Other Christians have a very poor spiritual appetite. What makes the difference? What are the reasons for poor spiritual appetite? What are the hindrances to a healthy spiritual appetite?

Appetite and sickness

Well, we have all experienced illness. And I don't need to tell you that when you are sick, you don't feel like eating. Think of the last time you had the flu. You had fever, you were sweating, your muscles were aching, you were too weak to do anything. You didn't feel like eating anything. And

perhaps, even the smell of food made you feel nauseous. So if your health is poor, your appetite will be poor. There is a connection between sickness and appetite.

It is the same thing in the spiritual world. Our spiritual appetite is poor maybe because we are sick spiritually. And we are sick spiritually because there is sin in our life. Sin is a hindrance to our fellowship with God. If we hide sins in our lives, our desire for God will inevitably grow cold. Our spiritual appetite will gradually fade away. If your conscience still bothers you, you will run away from God. If it doesn't bother you anymore, it simply means that your spiritual appetite has disappeared completely. By the grace and the power of God, let us make sure that we walk in a manner that is worthy of God, who gives us the spiritual food. Let us walk with God in all righteousness.

Appetite and activity

A second reason for poor spiritual appetite is the lack of exercise. If you sit in front of a desk working all day in that position, you won't necessarily have much of an appetite at the end of the day, certainly not as much as the person who exercised a lot. You would have noticed that physical exercise on a regular basis will increase your need for food. Therefore your appetite will increase. And so it might be that a poor spiritual appetite is caused by a lack of spiritual exercise, a lack of service in the kingdom of God. It is possible to claim to be a Christian and to do nothing for the Lord. In that case, there is not much of a spiritual appetite to be expected. I am not saying that we ought to exercise for the sake of our spiritual appetite. I am saying that there is a high chance that our spiritual appetite increases as we serve the Lord. And we are fed in our doing of God's service.

This reminds me of John 4:32 where Jesus says, *I have food to eat of which you do not know.* This was right after Jesus met the Samaritan woman. The disciples came to Jesus and brought to Him some food. You remember that Jesus didn't want to eat it. He said, 'I have food of which you don't even know.' Jesus wanted to tell them about another kind of food than the physical food that they brought to Him. What is that other food? Verse 34. *My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.* We are fed in our doing of God's service. It is in the process of serving Him that we are being fed. And that activity increases our spiritual appetite.

Feeding on the Word of God

Then the Bible tells us that the food that we need to feed on is also the Word of God. You will remember that verse which says, *Man shall not live by bread alone; but ... by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord* (Deuteronomy 8:3). Everybody knows that you need food to feed your body. But know also that you need spiritual food to feed your soul. Without that food, your soul is dead. And that spiritual food is the Word of God.

What does it mean to feed on God's Word? Feeding on the Word of God doesn't just mean reading it or studying it. Feeding on the Word of God means also doing it. You don't actually live by every word that comes from God until you live according to that word, until you do the will of God. We see this from the context in which we find the statement that *man shall not live by bread alone.*

Deuteronomy 8:3 reads like this. *So God humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not 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.*

The experience in the wilderness of physical hunger was designed by God to teach the Israelites a spiritual lesson, and the lesson being that they learn to continually depend on God. *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.* A few verses later, we are given God's expectation when someone feeds on the Word of God. In v. 6, we

read this. *Therefore* (i.e. after you eat the bread) *you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.* God wanted to make sure that the Israelites will keep on obeying God, that they will keep on doing the will of God. So the feeding on the Word of God implies that you do it. The evidence that you have digested the Word of God is that you walk according to the commandments of God.

And this leads us back to the words of Jesus when He said, *My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me.* To feed on the Word of God is to conform our life to the Word of God. It is to do His will. And as we do His will, God is feeding us. And this spiritual activity increases our appetite.

Tasting the goodness of God

Finally, appetite comes not only with good health and with exercise, but also with having tasted that the food is good. Sometimes, we might not feel very hungry. But if a nice dish is presented to us and we have a taste of that dish, then that will give us an appetite. In the same way, we will have a good spiritual appetite when we taste and see that the Lord is good. Psalm 34:8: *O taste and see that the Lord is good.* How do we know that God is the living God? How do we know that He is good? We taste God. The way to know that God is good is to experience Him. Take this living bread and see for yourself if it is good, if it gives life to your soul. Jesus is the living bread. As you taste Him and see how good He is, you will feel that your spiritual appetite will get more and more intense.

Having heard the Word of God today, let us receive Jesus into the innermost depth of our being so that we may draw from His life and strength in our walk with God. Let us continue to taste and experience His goodness towards us.

If you are not a Christian, if you haven't received that bread yet, let me urge you to ask God for that living bread. The whole point of the prayer is that because He is willing to give, you may ask. Don't miss that opportunity. This is a matter of vital importance to your eternal life. If today you carefully listened to this message of Jesus' teaching, don't harden your heart. Ask God that He may grant you this bread from heaven.