

**Altavista Presbyterian Church
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**“The Lord’s Prayer, Part III”
Deuteronomy 8:1-3
I Timothy 6:6-9**

**Second Sunday of Lent
March 17, 2019**

Deuteronomy 8:1-3

“The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers. And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

I Timothy 6:6-9

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

“The Lord’s Prayer, Part III”

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

If you remember from a few weeks ago to our miniseries on types of prayers, you may recall we discussed confession, thanksgiving, supplication, and intercession. Hopefully, you can see how these themes are present in the Lord’s Prayer. We see confession in “Forgive us our debts.” We see intercession in “As we forgive our debtors.” We see supplication in “Lead us not into temptation.” The one that is not so explicit is thanksgiving. Christ never overtly commands us to pray with gratitude. Those words are simply not there. However, I think thanksgiving is implied in the petition that is our focus for today: *Give us this day our daily bread*. I believe this is true because we are not only to be alert to our need for daily sustenance, but also to the reality of God’s daily provisions. When we realize this, we should, of course, be induced to an attitude of thanksgiving.

This simple request has a lot to teach us, therefore, I am going to examine each element in turn. First of all, notice how Jesus introduces this petition. Does he say to pray, “O God, sell us this day our daily bread” or “O God, exchange such-and-such deed for my daily bread?” No. Jesus teaches us to ask God to *give* us our daily bread. If we truly believe in the sovereign kingship of God, then we must believe that all things are his first and foremost. He says so in Psalm 50:10, “For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.” This petition reminds us that we are approaching our Holy King as needy beggars, destitute of any real property. We are asking for his charity. How many times do we think of our relationship to God in this way? Not very often, I assume. Not many of us want to think of ourselves as beggars or relying on someone else’s charity. We love our independence and self-reliance. And many of us love helping others, cooperating in mutual advancement. But that’s not supposed to be our

relationship with God. We should adopt a posture of dependence on him. James reminds us, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.”

God gives to his people because he is a God of providence. I know when we hear that word, providence, especially in Presbyterian circles, we automatically think predestination. That’s not what providence means. The root word is “provide.” God’s *provide-ence* is intimately connected to his promises. God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation with descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. God’s providence worked out that even though Sarah was barren, she ended up bearing a son. A few years later, God commanded Abraham, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love...and offer him...as a burnt offering...” God had provided this son, but now it seems he wants him back.

But Abraham did not hesitate. He remembered God’s promise. We’re told that he “rose early in the morning” to begin his journey to the mountain. Here again, God’s providence was at work. And Abraham trusted in it. At a heart-wrenching moment, Isaac notes that one of the elements of the sacrifice was missing. He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham did not respond, “You are that sacrifice because God insisted on it, my son.” Instead, he paused and said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” He was trusting in God’s promise of an heir and in his providence to provide a sacrifice other than Isaac. And indeed, God proved faithful by staying Abraham’s hand at the last moment and providing a ram instead. This is a perfect example of divine providence, of God’s act of provision, of giving something when there was a need.

For us today, we see his providence in his provision for our ultimate salvation. He provided for us Jesus, the Lamb without blemish, who was crucified for us. What’s more, God’s providence is also concerned with our more mundane, everyday needs. A little later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proclaims, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” He answers, “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Food to eat, water to drink, clothes to wear, and shelter for our bodies, these necessities are provided, so our focus should be on God and righteousness. When we pray this petition, we are asking, “In your sovereign providence, O God, please give us what we need. As you care for us, please provide us with the things we require for your work in this world.”

Now, it is important to deviate briefly and add this one note. There exists a synergistic relationship between divine providence and human labor. I know that was a big word, so let me define it. Synergy means two or more things are working together for a greater effect. This is what I mean. Jesus did not tell us to ask for our daily bread so that we can sleep in each morning and make no effort toward honest labor. In fact, the opposite is true. God commands us to be productive. In the chapter before our lesson this morning, Paul tells Timothy “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” Even before that, God placed Adam and Eve in the garden to tend it, and only after the Fall was their labor toilsome and tiring. We are created to work. So, on

the one hand, we have to trust in the benevolent providence of God for our daily provisions, and on the other hand, we are to be industrious, doing what we can to provide for our families under the rubric of glory to God alone. As we heard this morning, true godliness comes from a contentment with God's provisions. We are not to strive for things that God has not provided. To do so is selfish and arrogantly presumptive. You see, God works through means, and if we labor in our work, then his providence will be made manifest.

Our second point in the petition is asking God to give us *this day* our daily bread. Jesus didn't say we should be asking for our weekly, monthly, or retirement provisions. We are to ask for a day's worth of bread at a time. Back in the day, before preservatives and mass production, there were such things as local bakeries. One didn't go to the grocery store and buy a loaf of pre-sliced bread. One didn't use that bread all week. Since there weren't preservatives in it, bread was virtually inedible after one day. Many people relied on that daily provision of bread. Now, Jesus didn't prescribe we pray for our *daily* bread because of the lack of preservatives. Rather, he teaches us to pray so that we acknowledge our dependence on the providence of God to sustain us day by day.

The problem is, we don't live day by day anymore. In 21st century society, many of us often have our futures planned out. Thumb through my planner and you'll see meetings scheduled weeks in advance. Many of you probably use your phones to keep your calendar. What would happen if you lost your phone or it died unexpectedly? I know I'd forget what I need to do. Even if you don't keep a calendar, I imagine all of you have a pantry at home. And I imagine your pantries are a lot like ours, full of goods to get us through the week or even the month. Our chest freezer is full of meats. Yours might have pre-made meals that are quick to heat up. It's not our custom to face each new day with the fresh need to find food for our sustenance. Which means we are oftentimes slow to rely on God. Given this, we should pray ever the more fervently and apply this petition most diligently to our lives so that we may grasp our constant dependence on the provisions of God to sustain our daily living.

Our third point in this petition is asking God to give us our daily *bread*. I must say, it's obvious from scripture that Jesus is not telling us to pray *only* for bread. As Jesus quoted to Satan from our Old Testament lesson, "Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." Bread is an immensely powerful symbol of God's providence. When God tells Moses and Jesus tells Satan that we are dependent not on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord, they are saying that we are to be fully dependent upon God's good work. What the Deuteronomy passage is referencing is when God fed his people in the wilderness with manna from heaven. When the Israelites grumbled and said they wanted to go back to Egypt because at least there they had food, God promised to "rain bread from heaven" and so he did. The image of bread represents provisions.

This isn't lost on us today. In our marriage relationships, usually one of the partners is often called the "breadwinner." Historically this was the man, but nowadays it's whoever's salary is higher. But even in our slang, "dough" is a synonym for money. Or whenever the South is about to get hit by a winter storm, what's one of the first things to get wiped off the shelves? Bread. Why is that? I don't know. But it's symbolic of the importance of bread as a staple for our basic

needs. In most third-world countries, after a war settles down, there are many who are orphaned. Orphanages in these countries often discover that the children have anxiety at night and difficulty sleeping. What they learn is these kids are anxious about whether they will have food the next day. In some instances, the orphanage workers provide for these kids a little loaf of bread. Not so they can eat it, but simply so they can hold on to it while they fall asleep. They discovered that this helped immensely because the kids could rest assured that they would have something to eat the next day.

The same is true of the bread which Christ provided for us, the bread which he commended we should remember him by. In the liturgy of the Lord's Supper, we hear the words, "This is my body, broken for you." It should be no surprise that Jesus says this over the breaking of the bread. He is the Bread of Life. When he commands us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," we must not forget that we are asking for Christ himself. For without his sacrifice, his intercession on our behalf, and his promise to return, we would be without nourishment and without hope. This petition of the Lord's Prayer teaches us to come to God in a spirit of humble dependence and obedience, asking that he provide what we need, both our daily sustenance and our eternal salvation. We are not given the license, however, to pray for great riches or extravagances beyond God's providence. We are not a prosperity gospel. We are encouraged to make our needs known to God, trusting that he will provide.

Let us pray. Holy God, sometimes it feels like when we pray, we cannot see nor feel your hand. Sometimes it feels like you are distant and invisible. Remind us, O Lord, that when we pray to you, we should not pray generally. For when we pray generally, we only see your providence in general. Instead, we ask that you teach us to pray to you specifically, for our daily bread. May we pour out our souls and our needs to you in detail, so that we may see your answers in detail. May we put our trust in you, for we know that you are steadfast in your promises. Amen.