

Sunday 6<sup>th</sup>. May 2018  
Give us this day our daily bread

We are continuing with our examination of the elements of the Lord's Prayer. We come now to the one petition which deals with the physical aspect of our lives. You will remember that we have pointed out that of the six petitions of the Lord's Prayer, the first three relate to the glory and purposes of God, one relates to our physical needs, and the last two deal with the care of our souls.

This should strike us as quite a challenge as so much of our time energy and money in life is expended on our physical needs. The advertising world exists to play on our anxieties over what we have and what people will think of us if we don't have branded goods and so on. The world also constantly tells us that our happiness depends of having the most up to date versions of whatever it is peddling. However, some of the happiest people I have ever met lived in a third world country, and they felt sorry for us in the West because we have so much stuff, all we seem to do is worry about it! I remember as a child watching an elderly gentleman on the far side of a river. He had an old rod and ancient reel. The rod was worse for wear and was about two feet shorter than it had once been. However, as he moved upstream, he would stop and have a few casts here and there, and quite often his rod bent as another salmon was hooked! He did not have all the new shiny stuff, he concentrated on the main thing, the catching of fish, not looking like a model from a tackle magazine!

This petition is self-explanatory. However, it has grown a bit worn round the edges in my lifetime. This petition is simply for our daily physical needs. These are essentially food, clothing, water and shelter. It is probably worth pointing out that there are probably millions of people in the world who would be more than happy to have these, but who often struggle for even the basics. We have only to watch the charity adverts to see that things we take for granted are not available to so many. This is often the responsibility of those nations' governments, which because of corruption and greed do not care for the people and have made no provision for floods, droughts and famines. That is a gross over simplification, but local people must come to terms with these matters at the last.

The role of revival in community transformation is an important aspect which affects the well beings of nations and communities. There are sobering examples to consider. The thesis of Bready's book, 'England before and after Wesley,' is that the Methodist revival was a key factor which averted civil war in England and led to great social changes. The history of the Salvation Army and the Booths is similar. However we do not need to look that far back to learn of community transformations. Lewis in the 1950's and more recently, examples from South America. In all these situations, it was the transforming power of Christ coming into people's lives which led to social change. The best thing we can do for people in the troubled areas of the world is pray for them, evangelise them and feed them. It needs to include all three, or else we are saying that man can live by bread alone!

This is all an extremely complicated matter. No amount of aid alone seems to resolve the troubles of nations. However, we do need to consider our own situation as part of the whole.

We would have reason to include in our daily bread a state of peace. 1 Timothy 2 tells us to pray for a quiet and peaceable life as of first importance. I suspect that many peoples in the world would be happy for peace even if they then lived on bread and water.

In this petition we are instructed to pray for our daily needs, not greed's. We find it very difficult to find a dividing line between needs and greed's. Think of the last time we packed for a holiday. How difficult was it to limit what we feel we need to take with us. A person with one coat does not need to agonise which coat to take. Men usually have less trouble with which shoes to take since we tend to have fewer pairs than the ladies. However, when it comes to how much fishing tackle we take, or other sporting goods, well, that is where it all gets serious for some men!

Some of you will have seen the J. John, 'Just Ten' series on the Ten Commandments. His little rhyme about coveting is instructive, and sounds like something my Gran would have said. As regards our material possessions he said we should, 'Use it up, wear it out, make it do, do without.' This sounds like a disaster for the advertising industry, yet it is the way many in the West lived in the past. Cars were repaired, socks were darned, elbows of jerseys were patched, and replacement soles were stuck onto shoes. Not so now. I knew a family who bought a new sofa every year. They did not sell the old one, they took it to the dump! One year it was a milk white leather sofa and chairs that went, and not a mark on it! We live in a society which consumes, we are now used to bewildering choice in the supermarkets, readymade meals, and carry out food, at a click of a button!

I do not believe that this is what God has in mind when He invites us to pray for our daily bread. What we are faced with in this petition is an outlook which has rapidly disappeared in recent generations. Let us look at the implications of this prayer.

1. No matter how wealthy we are, all provision comes from God. I suppose as we become more and more separated from the source of food, we lose this sense of providence. There are people who could not look at a beast in a field, and then on a plate! It all has to come wrapped in plastic and as unlike a living thing as it can be made. However, this is still how things work. The farmer sows the seed, God waters it and gives it the growth. God gives growth to the grass and that feeds the beasts which we eventually eat, and so on, same with fish and the sea. In other words, no matter what we may do to cultivate food, if God does not give the growth, then we will not be fed.

This is the principle of general Providence. God causes His sun to shine and the rain to fall on all people, the righteous and the unrighteous. If this principle did not operate, then we would starve. We all complain, well most of us do, about having to cut the grass

to keep the garden neat. However if we ever lost the grass to some virus or drought, then the food production would grind to a halt. I have been told that the largest cattle farm used to be in central Australia. Thousands of cattle were grown for beef. However, years of drought have so reduced the growth of fodder, that the ranch is all but gone. We are utterly dependent of the Providence of God for our food.

Somewhere in the UK today, someone will kiss their spouse goodbye and say, 'see you at tea time.' They will not return. An accident or sudden illness will take them or maim them, and they will not be earning and then what of the big house, mortgage, and all the rest? We are not nearly as robust and self-sufficient as we think.

2. This recognition of our dependence on God's provision, and by the way, even if you do not believe in God, we are all dependent of the processes of nature. The Christian calls these processes of nature the laws of God, but however we choose to view them, we live in a world which is much less under our control than we often admit!

This recognition of our dependence on God should cause us to be thankful and grateful for what we have, and less taken up with the anxiety and frustration of what we want and don't have. Gratitude is the response which is appropriate to seeing that we have had grace extended to us. The UK, and perhaps Scotland and Ireland should be amongst the most thankful and grateful nations in the world! We have water which we can drink out of the tap. It is cold and clean and doesn't generally have wee bugs swimming in it. We have meat from the fields, fish from the sea, and so much good stuff all about us. To crown it all, we have the scenery, the mountains and coast the rivers and loughs. What more could we want? We should be skipping and singing, but most of the time we are not doing so! Why? Because we do not see and recognize the Providence of God and so want more and more and more, way beyond anything that could be called daily bread! I am now feeling very uncomfortable, because like most of us, I have more stuff than I know what to do with. Downsizing does not come easily! However, the starting place is not a great clean out, but thanksgiving to God for His Provision.

C.H. Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher, said of one of the Psalms, I forget which, that, 'he who is thankful for every blessing received, will not often be without a blessing for which to give thanks.' We know how this works in life. I am sure we all dislike the person who thinks that the world revolves about them and never shows appreciation to anyone. It does not incline us to be lavish in our giving. Fortunately, God is not like that, He gives all their daily bread, but there is a day of judgment coming where we will be held accountable to our response to God's mercies!

3. The daily bread requirements for a Christian should be different to those of non-Christians. This is a challenge, but let's look at it. For a Christian, where is our home? Is it on earth or in heaven? It is of course in heaven. This does not mean that we take a vow of poverty, but it does mean that if God has blessed us materially, then we have a duty to be generous with it and supply the needs of others and not hoard it for ourselves.

Riches or abundance of goods is not the problem. It is our attitude to them. Money is not the root of all evils, it is the love of money which is the root of all evils. A person in poverty can be as bound up in the love of money as the person who has bought their own bank! It is all about what place these things have in our hearts.

An old hymn by Gerhart Ter Steegan says that God acts to, 'gently loosens He thy hold of the former treasured things, loves and joys that were of old, shapes to which the spirit clings.' It is good to have abundance, but it may not always be good for us. John Wesley taught the early Methodists to, 'earn all you can, save all you can and to give all you can.' I think that is a good and challenging view.

All this is important to think through, because we have only a short time left to live, and it is decreasing every day. When we die, the only thing that we take through death is our souls. Our wallets can be thin or fat, but what of our souls. If we invested in our souls as carefully as we tend our stuff, we would be very different people, and the Church would not be in the state it is in generally in the land! The Bible speaks of this life as the place where we prepare for the next life. No one gets to keep the stuff we earn and accumulate here on earth. We are on a journey from here to heaven or hell. The gate to the path to heaven we are told, is narrow, and the path is steep. Do we really want to be carrying all our stuff along that path? Would we get it all through the gate? If we are only permitted so much weight of luggage on a flight, why do we think there is unlimited freight on the flight to heaven?

By all means if you have resources, enjoy them, but don't hold them so tightly that they have to be wrenched out of your hands. We are all aware of the pitiful sights we have seen on TV of poor souls walking for miles and weeks to escape this genocide or that war. We see old people with the clothes they have on their backs and not much else. Doesn't the instruction on the planes tell us that in an emergency, leave your belongings and get yourself out? The Bible says something similar – what does it profit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his soul? We are to travel light, and whatever stuff we have, even books and fishing tackle, hold it lightly!

4. The goal of all this is very practical. The objective of being concerned just for today's bread is to make us grateful to God for His daily Providence. To have God always before our eye is a wonderful blessing. When we receive daily bread, we are daily reminded that He is the source of all. The result of this way of thinking and living, is to lead us to contentment.

We sing the Psalm, but probably never contemplate it. 'The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want.' This is David's confession of faith. Because God is David's shepherd, God will lead him to green pastures and still waters, he will have his daily bread. In Matthew, Jesus tells us not to worry about these things. The object lesson are the birds and the flowers. These do not worry about their provision, yet God gives them life and sustenance. If God does that for birds and plants, the argument is that He will provide even more for the crown of His creation, which is humankind.

Perhaps by now, you think that we have lost the plot totally, but we have not. Here is another illustration. I can remember years ago working out what I would need to have in a pension pot to retire on two thirds of my then salary. The figures scared me then, and they are worse today. With the demise of the final salary pension scheme for many and the poor interest rates of recent years we now know that pensions are a huge problem for many. It may even be that by the time some of us retire, the State Pension will be but a memory! What are we to do? We cannot determine future events, but the words of David come to mind. He said as an old man, 'I have been young and now I am old and I have never seen the righteous forsaken or begging bread.' Earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can, and in all the rest, seek first the Kingdom and its righteous and all these other things will be given as well.

We fool ourselves if we think we can make a financial cushion to see us through. A war, a market crash, a fraud, can take all our stuff away. If that happens, nothing will have changed really. We will still be totally dependent on God's Providence to supply our daily bread!

Contentment is a great blessing. Paul tells us in Philippians that he had learned to be content in whatever circumstances he found himself to be in. Contentment is the fruit of gratitude to God and trust in God. It does not mean that we will never face need. If you want to think that one through, read the life of George Muller. He never made the financial needs of the orphanages known. There were times the children and staff sat down for breakfast and there was no food in the kitchen. Read the book and find out how God provided, sometimes, when it seemed impossible to do so.

It is actually very dangerous to doubt God for Providences and provisions. The history of Israel demonstrates this. If you read a few chapters of the book of Numbers, starting at chapter eleven, you will read the sad accounts of a people who had seen the plagues but not suffered them, who had been led out of Egypt, seen the enemy destroyed at the Red Sea. After all the people had seen and experienced, they moan and complain and grump. They complain about the Manna, the lack of water. They complain that the old days were better where they had leeks and onions and garlic in Egypt. They complained to Moses, about Moses and didn't realise that it was all a manifestation of unbelief and crass ingratitude to God.

Read about the temporal judgments that God poured out upon them and the number of times Moses intervened on their behalf to save them from their just deserts!

All of this is very serious, because if we are not looking to God to supply our daily bread, we will ascribe the provision to someone or something else, and that is not good!

Perhaps this little petition, 'give us this day our daily bread,' is actually a more searching prayer than we think. It is for daily bread, not for bread for the rest of our lives laid up somewhere. It is not a prayer for an eleven course banquet. An even more splendid meal is promised when Christ marries His Bride, the Church at the last Day. Until then,

we are on pilgrim ration, the intent is to keep us sustained for the journey, not falling asleep under a tree on the path.

David understood all this. Do you remember one of his prayers? It goes like this, 'don't give me so much that I forget about you, and don't give me so little that I become a thief and steal.'

The birds without barn or storehouse are fed;  
From them let us learn to trust for our bread:  
His saints what is fitting shall ne're be denied,  
So long as 'tis written, 'The Lord will provide.'

John Newton. From the hymn, 'Though troubles assail.'