

“The Prayer: Give Us This Day Bread, Forgiveness”

Matthew 6:5-9, 11-12; Luke 11:1-4a

A Sermon by Rev. Bob Kells

This morning we continue our study of the Lord’s Prayer. For Christians, this is THE Prayer. It is the best known, most recited, and most loved prayer for followers of Jesus Christ simply because it is the prayer Jesus gave us. We pray this prayer every week during our worship services. Some of us pray it every day as part of our devotional lives. If you were with us last week, I invited you to make the Lord’s Prayer a part of your daily prayers (if it isn’t already), for the rest of this sermon series.

Why do we pray this prayer? It may be hard for many of us to describe but in the Lord’s Prayer, we find something that is unique, holy; something we cannot fully explain; something that draws us deeper into the life of God; something that, changes us and the world around us when we pray this prayer, and we mean it.

Today, we reach a turning point in our study of the Prayer. The first part of the Lord’s Prayer contains three requests that are directed toward God:

- Hallowed by your name or, may your name be made holy.
- Your kingdom come.
- Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

All three of these ask for God’s priorities to be fulfilled. The next three appeals shift the nature of the requests from what we want for God, to what we want for ourselves:

- Give us this day our daily bread.
- Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
- And lead us not into temptation or, do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from evil.

These three petitions do not constitute a selfish “wish list.” God is not Santa Claus and we do not ask for toys from God. Everything we ask for in this prayer is in line with God’s will for our lives: Bread, forgiveness, rescue. Even with this turn to what we ask for ourselves, the Lord’s Prayer remains a God-centered prayer.¹ It remains so because in asking for these things we are recognizing both our inability to acquire them on our own, and who has the power to grant them.

The story is told that just after the death of Martin Luther, the famous Reformer of the 16th century, some of his friends came to his room to take away the body. They noticed a scrap of paper upon which Luther had written: “We are all beggars, this is true.”

And so we are. We are totally dependent on God for mercy and grace.²

Give us this day our daily bread.

Why did Jesus make a request for daily bread? The reasons are both simple, and complex.

1. To ask for bread is to ask for one of the fundamental needs of life—food, sustenance, nourishment. The way this request is phrased sounds a bit redundant: “Give us THIS DAY our DAILY bread.” Why not just say: “Give us bread this day,” or “Give us our daily bread.” I think asking God for daily bread “this day” is a way of asking for enough. If we think of daily bread as a ration, an amount we need for a single day, then we are asking God to provide for our needs for this day. This seems to be in line with Jesus’ thinking from the Sermon on the Mount:

“So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own,” Jesus told his followers. “Today’s trouble is enough for today” (Matthew 6:34). This is especially true for the poor, and Jesus knew a lot of poor people; they were the ones he lived with and ministered to on a daily basis. So, we can hear in “Give us this day our daily bread” an expression of Jesus’ concern for the poor, that they

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Part 1:	Part 2:
- Hallowed (or holy) be <u>your</u> name	- Give <u>us</u> this day our daily bread
- <u>Your</u> kingdom come	- Forgive <u>us</u> our debts, as we forgive our debtors
- <u>Your</u> will be done	- Lead <u>us</u> not into <u>temptation/ do not bring us to trial</u>

¹ C. Clifton Black, *The Lord’s Prayer, Interpretation, Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018, 141-142.

² Story recounted in Wesley Hill, *The Lord’s Prayer, A Guide to Praying to Our Father*, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 49.

might have enough to eat. It also turns our hearts, and our actions, to those who hunger, to people in our own nation and around the world, who lack the basics to keep themselves nourished. In this way, praying for daily bread is a prayer of solidarity with the poor.³ There are a couple of other ways to think about the meaning of daily bread in the Lord's Prayer.

2. This bread could be a reference to the future coming of Jesus as the centerpiece of life of God's new creation. The Lord's Prayer is not just a prayer for today but a prayer for God's future. We saw in the earlier requests for God's kingdom to come, the plea "that it may be on earth as in heaven." As the first Christians (most of whom were Jewish to begin with) looked back at their scriptures, they found images of a banquet that will be thrown by God for God's people. We find an example of this from the prophet Isaiah:
 "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear... Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken" (Isaiah 25:6, 8). The bread of the prayer can be thought of as a foreshadowing of God's coming kingdom and of the heavenly banquet, where everyone's needs are met by God.
3. One other way to think of the bread is to connect it with Holy Communion, also known as the Eucharist. In the Gospel of John, Jesus pointed to himself as the bread that comes down from heaven: "I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness and they died. ... I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:48-51). It is no accident that we pray the Lord's Prayer at every Communion table. It points to Jesus as the bread of heaven who has come down to supply our deepest, most spiritual needs. And it points to Jesus as the true bread, the bread we need every day, the bread without which, we cannot survive.

Forgive us our debts/sins.

Debts/Sins

"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matthew 6:12)

"And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us." (Luke 11:4a)



Here's something else we find in the Lord's Prayer that is not accidental. The very next "ask" to God is for God to forgive us our debts/sins. I think these two, bread and forgiveness, are closely linked in the Prayer because we need them both every day of our lives. Notice there is a difference in the words used between Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer and the one found in Luke:

- And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors (Matthew 6:12).
- And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us (Luke 11:4a).

Debt or sin? Or is it debt and sin? Or "trespass," which means an offense, and is the word we use more often in praying the Lord's Prayer?

I think this is a "both/and" situation. Debts were a serious problem in the ancient world. Many people living at the time of Jesus barely made ends meet. And when they couldn't, they went into debt. And when they couldn't pay their debts, they were forced into slavery or thrown into prison. Debt needed forgiveness; forgiveness that would lead to freedom. Sin was also a serious problem in the ancient world, as it is today. It also takes forgiveness to liberate us from the oppression of sin. Jesus followed in the tradition of the Hebrew Bible in viewing sin as part of the human condition. We were made in the image of God, but we are disobedient; our natural tendency is to stray, to rebel, to go against what God wants for us. Sin is universal for human beings.

³ M. Eugene Boring and Fred B. Craddock, *The People's New Testament Commentary*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 37.

The Apostle John made this clear: “If we say that we have not sinned, we make [God] a liar, and his word is not in us. ...If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:10, 8).

Because everyone sins, every person is guilty and stands in need of forgiveness from God. In this sense, sin is a debt we owe to God, one we cannot repay on our own. Only God is capable of covering this debt, of forgiving our sin.⁴ And God has done this through Jesus.

“What can wash away my sin?” asks the old hymn? “Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”⁵

As we have also forgiven our debtors.

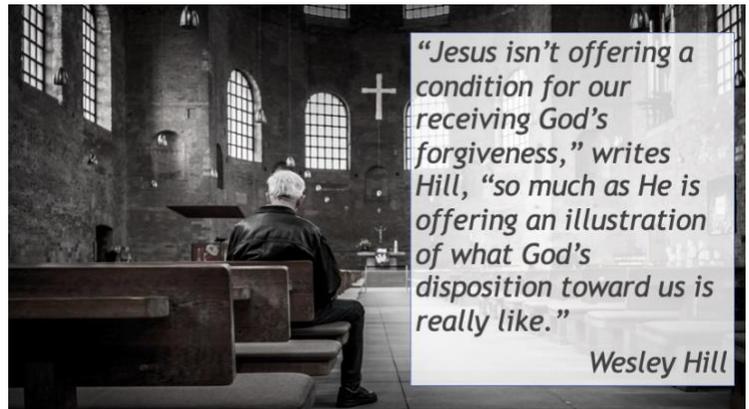
What does it mean to ask God to forgive us our sins/debts/trespasses, as we forgive others? Does this mean our forgiveness by God will happen only after we forgive the sins other people have committed against us? That is one way to read it. My sins will not be forgiven unless, and until, I have already forgiven others. But this would create a serious problem: It would make our forgiveness conditioned on our own frail, flawed human inability to forgive others. And we know that cannot be the case.

A better way to understand this part of the Prayer is supplied by Bible scholar Wesley Hill. It’s not that we are forgiven only *after* we forgive; we forgive because we know God forgives us first. The order of forgiveness matters.

“Jesus isn’t offering a *condition* for our receiving God’s forgiveness,” writes Hill, “so much as He is offering an *illustration* of what God’s disposition toward us is really like.”⁶

Hill continues:

“Think about the times when you have actually extended forgiveness to someone who hurt you. Remember the stirring in your gut when your spouse or your sibling brokenheartedly acknowledged the way they were in the wrong, the way they neglected you, humiliated you, or stabbed you in the back. Recall the surge of compassion that you experienced when you said out loud to them, ‘I forgive you. I don’t hold this against you, and it’s not going to keep me from continuing to love you.’ That...is what Jesus wants you to hold in your mind as you pray to God to forgive you because God’s forgiveness is that wonderful, only more so.”⁷



Another way to put this may be to say: We forgive **because** God forgives us. And Knowing the love and mercy God has for us, that has to be a source of great comfort for all of us.

Conclusion

- Daily bread.
- Forgiveness.
- We need them every day.

They, along with the other parts of the Lord’s prayer, are how we ask rightly of God for what we need to live in right relationship with God and with each other. They are answers to the question the disciples originally posed when they approached Jesus and asked, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

I want to close with a story that, I hope, will teach us about learning to pray:

Years ago, CBS news correspondent Charles Kuralt went “On the Road” to bring us stories of ordinary people who lived peaceably with their neighbors. One of them was Agatha Burgess, an 80-year-old widow living just outside the small town of Buffalo, South Carolina. Agatha got up at 5 o’clock in the

⁴ Boring & Craddock, 37.

⁵ Robert Lowry, “Nothing but the Blood,” *United Methodist Hymnal* #362.

⁶ Hill, *The Lord’s Prayer*, 65.

⁷ Hill, *The Lord’s Prayer*, 66.

morning to cook sumptuous, Thanksgiving-like meals for the local Meals on Wheels, and anyone else who needed a good dinner. She asked that they donate \$2.75 for their food, and if they couldn't afford it, she let them eat for free.

Agatha did this five days a week for over 15 years.

When asked why she went to all this trouble, she replied:

'I love it...I just fall in love with people...I always wanted to be a person that lived by the side of the road, and be a friend to man. I have always wanted that. I've never wanted a big, fine home, I'm just satisfied like I am. I know you probably have a big, fine home—I don't want your big, fine home—I'm glad you got it. And I can enjoy and just be happy that you have it. But me, I'm fine. Got what I want. I always get everything I want—but I know *what* to want.'⁸

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us what to want. May we always pray for what God wants us to want:

- For bread.
- For forgiveness.
- For the kingdom to come.

May it always be so.

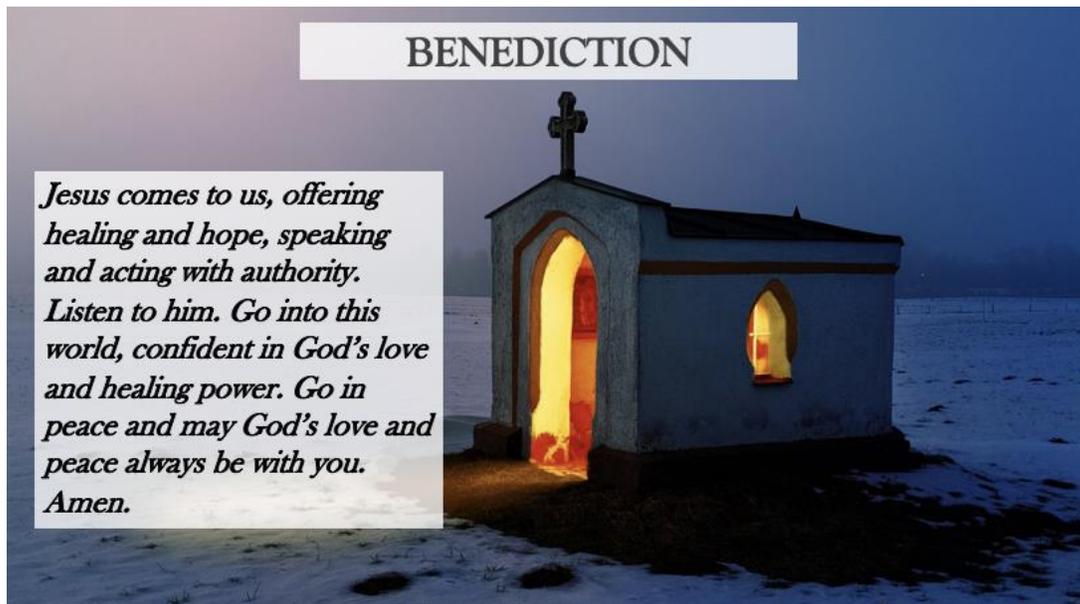
In the name of Jesus. Amen.

If you want to know more:

C. Clifton Black, *The Lord's Prayer, Interpretation Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018).

Wesley Hill, *The Lord's Prayer, A Guide to Praying to Our Father*, (Christian Essentials), (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

N.T. Wright, *The Lord & His Prayer*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996).



⁸ Story cited in Black, *The Lord's Prayer*, 159-160.