

THE LORD'S PRAYER Chapter 5 The Fourth Petition

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Transcript

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Chapter 5

The Fourth Petition

"Give us this day our daily bread"

Matthew 6:11

We turn our attention to those petitions that more immediately concern ourselves. The fact that our Lord placed three petitions that relate directly to God's legitimate interests first should sufficiently indicate to us that we must labor in prayer to promote the manifestative glory of God, to advance His Kingdom, and to do His will before we are permitted to supplicate for our own needs. These petitions that more immediately concern ourselves are four in number, and in them we may clearly discern an implied reference to each of the Persons of the blessed Trinity. Our temporal needs are supplied by the kindness of the Father. Our sins are forgiven through the mediation of the Son. We are preserved from temptation and delivered from evil by the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit. Let us carefully note the proportion that is observed in these last four petitions: one of them concerns our bodily needs; three relate to the concerns of the soul. This teaches us that in prayer, as in all other activities of life, temporal concerns are to be subordinated to spiritual concerns. "Give us this day our daily bread." Perhaps it will be helpful if we begin by raising a number of questions. First, why does this request for the supply of bodily needs come before those petitions that concern the needs of the soul? Second, what is signified by, and included in, the term bread? Third, in what sense may we suitably beg God for our daily bread when we already have a supply on hand? Fourth, how can bread be a Divine gift if we earn the same by our own labors? Fifth, what is our Lord inculcating by restricting the request to "our daily bread"? Before attempting to answer these queries let us say that, with almost all of the best of the commentators, we regard the prime reference as being to material bread rather than to spiritual. Matthew Henry has astutely pointed out that the reason this request for the supply of our physical needs heads the last four petitions is that "our natural [well being] is necessary [for] our spiritual well-being in this world." In other words, God grants to us the physical things of this life as helps to the discharge of our spiritual duties. And since they are given by Him, they are to be employed in His service. What gracious consideration God shows toward our weakness: we are unapt and

unfit to perform our higher duties if deprived of the things needed for the sustenance of our bodily existence. We may also rightly infer that this petition comes first in order to promote the steady growth and strengthening of our faith. Perceiving the goodness and faithfulness of God in supplying our daily physical needs, we are encouraged and stimulated to ask for higher blessings (cf. Acts 17:25-28). "Our daily bread" refers primarily to the supply of our temporal needs. With the Hebrews, bread was a generic term, signifying the necessities and conveniences of this life (Gen. 3:19; 28:20), such as food, raiment, and housing. Inherent in the use of the specific term bread rather than the more general term food is an emphasis teaching us to ask not for dainties or for riches, but for that which is wholesome and needful. Bread here includes health and appetite, apart from which food does us no good. It also takes into account our nourishment: for this comes not from the food alone, nor does it lie within the power of man's will. Hence God's blessing on it is to be sought. "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer" (1 Tim. 4:4, 5). In begging God to give us our daily bread, we ask that He might graciously provide us with a portion of outward things such as He sees will be best suited to our calling and station. "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:8, 9). If God grants us the superfluities of life, we are to be thankful, and must endeavor to use them to His glory; but we must not ask for them. "And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:8). We are to ask for "our daily bread." It is to be obtained not by theft, nor by taking by force or fraud what belongs to another, but by our personal labor and industry. "Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread" (Prov. 20:13). "She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness" (Prov. 31:27). How can I sincerely ask God for this day's bread when I already have a good supply on hand? First, I may ask this because my present temporal portion may speedily be taken from me, and that without any warning. A striking and solemn illustration of this is found in Genesis 19:15-25. Fire may burn down one's house and everything in it. So by asking God for the daily supply of our temporal needs, we acknowledge our complete dependency upon His bounty. Second, we should plead this petition every day, because what we have will profit us nothing unless God deigns also to bless the same to us. Third, love requires that I pray this way, because this petition comprehends far more than my own personal needs. By teaching us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," the Lord Jesus is inculcating love and compassion toward others. God requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to be as solicitous about the needs of our fellow Christians as we are of our own needs (Gal. 6:10). How can God be said to give us our daily bread if we ourselves have earned it? Surely such a quibble scarcely needs reply. First, God must give it to us because our right to it was forfeited when we fell in Adam. Second, God must bestow it because everything belongs to Him. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). "The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, saith the Lord of hosts" (Haggai 2:8). "Therefore will I return, and take away My corn in the time thereof, and My wine in the season thereof" (Hosea 2:9). Therefore we hold in fee from our Lord (that is, on condition of homage and service) the portion He bestows. We are but stewards. God grants us both possession and use of His creation, but retains to Himself the title. Third, we ought to pray this way because all that we have comes from God. "These wait all upon Thee; that Thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That Thou givest them they gather: Thou openest Thine hand, they are filled with good" (Ps. 104:27, 28; cf. Acts 14:17). Although by labor and purchase things may be said to be ours (relatively speaking), yet it is God who gives us strength to labor. What is Christ inculcating by restricting the request to "our daily bread"? First, we are reminded of our frailty. We are unable to continue in health for twenty-four hours, and are unfit for the duties of a single day, unless constantly fed from on high. Second, we are reminded

of the brevity of our mundane existence. None of us knows what a day may bring forth, and therefore we are forbidden to boast ourselves of tomorrow (Prov. 27:1). Third, we are taught to suppress all anxious concern for the future and to live a day at a time. "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matthew 6:34). Fourth, Christ inculcates the lesson of moderation. We are to stifle the spirit of covetousness by forming the habit of being contented with a slender portion. Finally, observe that our Lord's words, "Give us this day our daily bread," are appropriate for use each morning, whereas the expression He teaches in Luke 11:3, "Give us day by day our daily bread," ought to be our request every night. In summary, then, this petition teaches us the following indispensable lessons: (1) that it is permissible and lawful to supplicate God for temporal mercies; (2) that we are completely dependent upon God's bounty for everything; (3) that our confidence is to be in Him alone, and not in secondary causes; (4) that we should be grateful, and return thanks for material blessings as well as for spiritual ones; (5) that we should practice frugality and discourage covetousness; (6) that we should have family worship every morning and evening; and (7) that we should be equally solicitous on behalf of others as for ourselves.

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