Give us this day our daily bread

We continue our meditation on the Lord’s prayer and come today to “Give us this day our daily bread”.

Have you had breakfast today? Toast? Cereal? Fresh pastry? Pizza! Plans for lunch? Fresh bread rolls? This is life as human beings isn’t it? The never-ending question of our daily bread. And this wonderful prayer helps us to make this daily question part of our daily prayer. There is a distinctive spirituality here in this short prayer and I want to share a little of that with you today.

This section of the prayer marks an important transition. Let’s look back for a moment to remind ourselves what has preceded this request.

In the first half of the prayer Jesus teaches us to express our deep longing for the coming Kingdom of God. A longing that God and his name should be revered in the world; that his saving rule should come and that his will should be done in our world. In this way Jesus teaches us to look to the future and to pray in hope. God’s heart is for the people of the world. He has a plan and a purpose for us; a good plan and a good purpose. We live in expectation and hope. And so Jesus teaches us to seek this future in prayer. That’s the first half of the prayer.
We could of course just stay here in the first half of this prayer. Imagine the kind of spirituality that would create. It would be future oriented. Positive and hopeful. Big picture.

But it would be detached wouldn’t it? “Yes” we could ask “but what about today? What about the problems of everyday life?”

And that’s where the second half of the prayer takes us. The Kingdom we seek is coming into this troubled world. And that’s where we live: seeking the Kingdom amidst the everyday troubles of ordinary life. Where hungry mouths must be fed each and every day. Where people upset each other and God. Where times of trial and difficulty descend upon us from time to time. The second half of the Lord’s prayer takes us into this very familiar world. And teaches us how to pray there. How to articulate our faith in that world.

Today Jesus teaches us how to pray about bread; how to pray about our material needs. “Give us this day our daily bread”. This morning I hope to draw out two principles that this short prayer articulates. The first is our dependence on God. And the second is what I have called a ‘realistic’ faith in God.

In this prayer we give voice to our

1. **Dependence on our Father God**

**Explanation** We know don’t we how much we need to eat and drink? We know it at the core of our being that we have this constant need for food and drink. We can last three days without water and three weeks without food. But then we die. And we don’t need to wait three days or weeks to begin to feel this constant demand our bodies place on us. Our inner alarm clocks are set to go off every three hours or so. Or less.

And then of course there are so many other material needs that we have: shelter, a place to sleep, a way to wash our selves, a toilet, and many others. We are curiously dependent creatures.

Knowing this Jesus teaches us to bring this constant need to our heavenly Father.

In this way we give voice to our complete dependence on our Father God. We look to God to supply our needs. We can and do look elsewhere and I want to speak about that in a minute. But Jesus teaches us to look always to God, our Father God.

In this way we take our right place in relation to God. We are his creatures and he is our creator. We exist in the first place because of his choice and decision. And we continue to exist because of his provision. It is very good and very healthy to understand ourselves in this way. It’s what the Bible elsewhere calls thinking of ourselves with sober judgement (Rom 12:3). And also the “fear of God” which is the foundation of true wisdom (Prov 1:7).

This acknowledgment of our dependence on God is the key to a right relationship with God. And the reverse is true as well. If we
fail to acknowledge God and give thanks to him for his gracious provision then we are sinners.

Jesus wants his disciples to pray this prayer on a daily basis: “…daily bread”. And in this way to make an acknowledgment of our dependence on God a constant feature of our lives. There will never come a day on which we become independent of God.

Our dependence on our heavenly Father is core territory then in our understanding of ourselves and our relationship with God.

**Illustration** I imagine you have heard about Jeremy Clarkson’s recent lapse? He was suspended from the very popular TV show Top Gear because he assaulted and abused one of the show’s producers because there was no hot food at the hotel one evening. A day or so later Nestle sent him a box of their Snickers bars with a large note on it saying “You’re not you when you are hungry”!

I suspect however that you are exactly you when you are hungry. The way we respond to this constant need for food and for material provision probably reveals exactly what we are made of. And precisely what we are relying on in order to meet our needs. In Clarkson’s case on his own power. For those who take this prayer into their hearts and lives it will be something quite different: a deep dependence on God.

Jesus provides two wonderful illustrations of this dependence in this very sermon. See Matt 6:25-34.

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.
Application  And so Jesus teaches to model our lives on the birds and the lilies. My guess is that for most of us this just sounds quaint and rustic. And so far removed from our everyday experience of life where we live in constant anxiety about our material provision. In fact it probably sounds profoundly irresponsible.

How can this be so? How can the plain teaching of Jesus about dependence on God seem like childish irresponsibility?

Well in my view it is a measure of our compromise with the idols of the modern world. Jesus called this idol Mammon. We call it Money. And sometimes the Markets. The ideology that accompanies this idolatry is acquisitive materialism: the idea that owning things is the secret of daily provision. If you own a house and have money in the bank then your future is secure.

The scriptures warn the rich not to put their trust in their wealth (1 Tim 6:17). And why? Because it is so unreliable. And Jesus warns us all not to store up treasure on earth (Matt 6:19). And why? Because they corrode and decay. Because thieves can break in and steal it. Earthly treasure is transient and temporary. Instead we are to seek the Kingdom of God and so to place our treasure and focus our hearts on what God is doing in the world.

Like all idols Mammon is deceitful and abusive, just as the evil one who stands behind it. Think for a moment about the state of anxiety in which we all live; endlessly worried about money, and about property prices, and how we or our children can buy a house and provide for our futures. How strange! We live in one of the richest nations of the earth at the richest time in human history. And yet we live in such a state of chronic anxiety. Surely this shows the deceitfulness of Mammon and the wrong-headedness of living by its cruel demands.

Friends, in my view we and the western Church are seriously compromised over this issue. We are trying to worship both God and Mammon. We need to find our way back into this simple prayer: give us this day our daily bread. And to the spirituality of the birds and the grass.

Owing a house is a good thing but it is a little thing. Living in shelter and providing it for your family; that is a wonderful thing. Our heavenly Father knows that and hears us when we ask him for that.

Having a lot of cash in the bank. It’s a good thing. But it is a little thing. Having money to provide for our households day by day; that is a wonderful thing. Our heavenly Father knows that and hears our prayer when we ask him for that.

Which brings me to my second theme today. This short prayer allows us to give voice to a...
2. ‘Realistic’ faith in our Father God

Explanation I am struggling here a little. And not sure if I have quite captured what I am trying to say.

This prayer gives voice to an earthy kind of faith. It draws us into everyday life and encourages us to pray there. I’ve already made the point that the second half of the Lord’s prayer does this. And you can’t get more down-to-earth than our daily bread!

I love the transition here from v10 to v11; from heaven to the mundane affairs of human life. Jesus teaches us to pray in successive breaths about heaven and our daily bread.

This teaches us something wonderful about our God. The God of the Bible is both “Our Father who is in Heaven…” and our Father who knows what we need in our day-to-day lives. God Himself bridges heaven and earth.

This truth is of course seen most fully in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus. The pre-existent Son of God comes to us as a human being: fully God and fully human. In His Son God bridges heaven and earth.

I make this point to counter a tendency I see among Christians towards idealism; a tendency to think of God in pure, abstract terms. And so to make the mistake of thinking that God is by definition remote, distant and detached.

There is a common way of communicating the gospel which makes this mistake.

God is perfect right? Of course. Are you perfect? Obviously not. How then can a perfect God have anything to do with you? How could a perfect God receive an imperfect person into his heaven? As Jesus says “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48).

Is there a solution? Yes there is: the substitutionary death of Jesus. He died so that we might be made perfect and so able to be in a relationship with God.

Now there is more than enough Biblical truth here to make this very persuasive. But there is a flaw. And it crept in at the very start: God is perfect. That’s an ideal. It’s not the biblical idea of perfection which something like fulfilling your role.

And so we idealise God as perfect. And then it follows inevitably that we cannot match up to that ideal. And so from the start we assume a distance, a separation, a fundamental detachment from God. Deep down we think of God as perfect in a way that separates him from us and from the muddle of everyday life.

But in this prayer Jesus invites us to trust in and to pray to the God who is very much connected to the messy world in which we live day after day.
I am calling that faith a ‘realistic faith. This prayer invites us to give voice to a ‘realistic’ faith in our Heavenly Father.

**Application** What does this kind of faith look like? What kind of prayer does it suggest?

Well I think it suggests simple and direct prayer. “Heavenly Father, here is the need of the moment. We set it before you because we believe it matters to you. Help us today.”

This means we don’t have to pretend when we pray. It means that we can pray with our eyes wide open about the situation before us. It means that our Father God is sending us into the world to engage it as it really is armed with a simple and wonderful prayer: Lord meet the needs of this person today. Lord meet our needs today.

It is as simple as that. Let’s be careful of the kind of Christian prayer that requires us to pretend about what is happening. Sometimes people feel that having prayed for a miracle they must somehow pretend that the miracle has occurred or that it will occur. That looks like faith. But it’s not this kind of realistic faith. It’s a faith which means we cannot see or tell the truth.

And in my mind that is not really faith. It’s more like a spiritual lever to get God into the story. And that assumes he is not in it and not interested. Realistic faith trusts that our heavenly Father is very much involved in our very human affairs. And that we can speak to him from the very centre of our muddled-up, mixed-up lives. And that he hears and sees and knows and cares.

Dear friends, I know that from time to time each of us face really major challenges. You might be facing such a serious challenge today. It might be about money. Or the welfare of your loved-ones. Or decisions you made and have come to regret and must now live through. Or health issues. Or loss. Or grief. Or isolation.

This is life for all of us. Life brings with it various troubles. If we did not know this from experience we could learn it here in the Sermon on the Mount. See 6:34: “Each day has … troubles of its own”. But we do know it from experience. And perhaps you know it today especially.

I want to encourage you today to pray in a simple, realistic way about this matter. Pray for yourself. And perhaps ask someone else to pray with you. Not some theatrical, pretending prayer. Just a plain, simple prayer to your loving heavenly Father.

I pray this prayer in one form or another most days: this prayer that God would provide for us. I don’t ever find it an easy prayer to pray. I won’t pretend that it relieves me of the constant concern I have to earn enough to meet all the needs of my family. I know that the primary way God will answer this prayer is through my labour. But I pray it in faith. And I give thanks for the way God does provide for us day after day. And in this way I experience the presence of God in the daily grind of everyday life. My heavenly Father sees; he knows; he cares; I trust him.
Conclusion

And so Jesus teaches us to pray in the midst of everyday life. To give voice to our constant dependence on God and to our realistic faith in Him.

Maybe this prayer for our daily bread will leave us with a mundane, humdrum relationship with God. I guess we might be tempted to think this diminishes our awareness of the greatness of God.

Maybe so.

But think of the Israelites. When they wandered in the wilderness all those years God provided food for them day by day. The Israelites called it...manna. Manna? What is it? Every day as they went out to collect this mysterious food they marveled at it. They gathered it up with a sense of wonder at God’s extraordinary way of providing for their daily need for nourishing food.

I think this short prayer brings us to the same place. It helps us to see God’s daily provision with gratitude and wonder. It fills even the most mundane of human experiences with joy and delight.

We pray “Give us this day our daily bread”. Our heavenly Father hears our prayer and meets our needs: our need for food and our need to know his loving care.