

The Lord's Prayer: "Give Us Our Daily Bread" and "Forgive Us Our Debts"

Introductory Comments

1. When we think about "daily bread," it's hard not to think of (at least) two distinct bread stories: the "manna in the wilderness" story, and the "loaves and fishes" miracle story. Both of these stories are foundational for understanding the "daily bread" line in the Lord's Prayer. While we will focus on these two stories for our discussion today, the word "bread" also conjures up other share-meals with Jesus such as the eucharistic meal and the Emmaus meal. While it is true that Jesus spends a lot of time around food, it is never just about food. It is always about *just* food, and the way that daily bread represents daily justice for all.
2. In the first half of the Lord's Prayer (the parts that pertain to God's name, kingdom, and will) there are no "ands" between them. Each of those three challenges is subsumed into the other ones despite a deliberate climax in presentation. God's name cannot be hallowed except through the coming of God's kingdom, which results in God's eternal will being done one earth. But the prayer's second half is cumulative; hence those "ands" between bread and debt as well as between debt and temptation. It is not about bread *or* debt *or* temptation, but about all three together in a crescendo.
3. The establishment of the Sabbath in Israel was not simply about the seventh day, but also about the seventh year (*schmita*), and the 50th year. So, each week, sabbath rest would be observed as a sign of God's liberating power. Then, after six years, a Sabbath year would be observed where all fields would rest for one year, all debts would be forgiven, and debt slaves would be freed (unless you're a foreigner). Finally, in the 50th year, Sabbath Jubilee would be observed, which is the climactic expression of sabbath. Jubilee was a time for all slaves and prisoners to be freed, and all alienated property to be returned to its original familial ownership as a way of reminding the people that land cannot be sold in perpetuity; for ultimately, God is the landowner, and the people are but tenants. Jubilee restores the balance and justice that God originally intended.

Questions, then review today's lines from Lord's Prayer

Questions for Discussion

1. **Read Exodus 16:4-5, 14-26. What does the manna story teach us about "our daily bread"?** *The emphases are quite clear. When God distributes food there is enough for each and every day; there is miraculously the same amount for each person per day no matter what each takes; there is no hoarding*

because it spoils overnight; there is no food even present on the Sabbath, but twice as much the day before; but when that pre-Sabbath bread is kept overnight, it "[does] not become foul, and there [are] no worms in it." (Ex 16:24).
What makes it hard to live in this way (daily trusting in God's provision)?

- 2. Read Mark 6:30-44. How does the miracle of the loaves and fish describe God's intentions with providing daily bread? What does bread symbolize for you? How do you connect God and "our daily bread"? In wanting to send the people away, the disciples indicate that they think Jesus' teaching of the crowd is sufficient. But Jesus, in saying to the disciples, "You give them something to eat," broadens the whole purpose of his ministry. It's not just about teaching and learning. It's about feeding the whole person. And it's not something Jesus does – it's something we all must do. It's the disciples' responsibility to feed. But not theirs alone. Because, when they gather the resources, Jesus takes and blesses it, and then breaks it and the disciples distribute it. This pattern of blessing and breaking bread is the foundational meal of the new community that Jesus creates. Where bread is blessed, broken, and shared, there is always enough. Notice that the line in the prayer is not "Give ME today MY daily bread." It's about the community, and the sustenance that enables the community to thrive together. Consider the Emmaus story from Luke. The strangers on the road don't fully recognize Jesus through his teachings (sure, it warms their hearts, but that's it). It is only when they break bread together in community that Jesus is made known.**

- 3. The biblical notion of "debt" is closely tied to "slavery" and the hope of redemption and freedom. What are some ways you can think of that people become enslaved? Physical bodily slavery, slavery to substance/food/materialism, debt slavery, to name a few. In our contemporary world, it can sometimes seem that places where physical slavery is forbidden by law have replaced it with debt slavery. Perhaps excessive debt is a far better way of owning or controlling individuals and nations than old-fashioned forms of direct slavery and colonialism? In this way, many argue that we should interpret "forgive us our debts" quite literally!**

- 4. God's justice, as embodied in the redemption of Israel's enslavement in Egypt, calls for the forgiveness of our debts and our pledge to forgive the debts of others. When you imagine yourself free from all your debts, what comes to mind? Why is being forgiven our debts connected to forgiving the debts of others? What would it look like in your life to live this prayer more fully? As humans, we have been created in the image and likeness of God. That means that we bear God's image in the world. As God**

is a God of justice, balance, and fairness, we are called to be the same – in other words, to run God’s world with God, through God, and in God. As previously stated, Paul referred to humans as “heirs of God.” As divine heirs, we are responsible never to increase but always alleviate the “groaning of creation” (Rom 8:17-22). God established the Sabbath system (day, year, and Jubilee) for the purpose of wiping out debts and restoring balance, equitability, and dignity in community. To honor these establishments, we owe it to God to run God’s world responsibly. We owe God collaboration in hallowing God’s name, in establishing God’s kingdom, and in doing God’s will “as in heaven so also on earth.” We owe it to God to cease focusing on heaven, especially in order to avoid focusing on earth. We owe it to God to ensure that there is enough food and not too much debt in God’s household.

****For next session, we will cover “Lead Us Not Into Temptation” and the Doxological ending*