

**“LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY”
GIVE US OUR DAILY BREAD
Matthew 6:11 with 25-34**

Please review this week’s catechism question.

Did you meet anyone new after worship this past Sunday?

INTRODUCTION

What do you worry about most often? What happens to you and your relationships when you worry?

For most of us, most of the time, the things that we worry about, the things that preoccupy us are not things related to the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer. Most of us worry about and give our time and attention to the things necessary and desirous for a safe and pleasant life on this earth. Amazingly, Jesus commands us to ask God to give us today our daily bread; that is the things that we must have to live on earth. God is concerned about our life on earth and he commands us to ask him to give us what we need to live each day on the earth. As we begin this consideration of what it means to ask God for our daily bread there are several questions we must answer.

A. What does “bread” refer to?

Jesus uses bread as a symbol for everything we need to live on earth. Martin Luther, the great German reformer defines bread as, “everything required to satisfy our bodily needs, such as food and clothing, house and home, fields and flocks, money and property; a pious spouse and good children, trustworthy servants, godly and faithful rulers, good government; seasonable weather, peace and health, order and honor; true friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.”

B. According to Psalm 145:15-16, Matthew 5:45, Acts 14:16-17, 17:24-25, to whom does God give “bread”? What must people do to get God to give them “bread”?

God gives to all human beings everything they need to live on earth without regard to their “worthiness”. He gives everything to all men, whether they pray or not, whether they trust Christ or not. This abundant provision is overwhelming testimony to his power and grace to every human being.

C. Does Jesus command us to ask God for our daily bread because he won’t give us what we need to live without asking? Will he stop giving you food if you don’t ask? Does he command us to ask our Father for daily bread because prayer will get him to give us more daily bread than if we did not pray?

God is not telling those whom he has made his very own children through the death of his Son that the only way he will provide for them is if they pray. He gives to everyone else without prayer but he’ll only give to us if we pray. Your having food to eat is not contingent upon your asking God to give you food. He gives to those who pray and to those who do not pray as an expression of his grace to all creation. Your Father in heaven knows what you need before you ask him. How many parents only give their children food when they ask but if they don’t ask they don’t give them food? Parents provide for their children whether they ask or not.

If my having food, clothing and shelter is not dependent upon my praying and if I won’t be given more by praying, then why does Jesus command that we ask God to give us our daily bread?

I think the answer to that question is contained in the second half of Matthew 6, which begins in v. 19 with Jesus saying, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and thieves do not break in and steal.” Then in vv. 25-34 he commands that we not worry about our life. What I want to do is to show you how asking your Father to provide your daily bread is the necessary means for obeying the command to not worry about what you need to live on earth. The apostle Paul makes this connection explicit in Philippians 4:6-7 when he says, “Do not worry about anything but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” The fact is that either you and I are worrying or we are praying. Either

we are storing up treasures on earth or we are storing up treasures in heaven. These two things do not go together. True prayer is the antidote to worry and to storing up earthly treasure. Jesus wants us to ask God to give us our daily bread so that we will not worry. We are going to examine vv. 25-34 to see three things that Jesus wants us to keep in mind as we ask God to provide our daily bread.

STUDY

1. What is worry? Read through vv. 25-34 to identify how Jesus uses the word. (Compare with 1 Cor. 7:32-34 where the same Greek word is translated “concern” and Phil. 2:27-28 where it is translated “anxiety”.)

This word that is translated worry actually contains two meanings. First, worry can be fear or panic that we are not going to be provided for or that we are going to lose something we value (This is what Paul means by the anxiety he felt about Epaphroditus when he was ill.). Worry in this sense is that dread or anxiety that keeps us up at night, that gives us ulcers, that makes us crazy. It is walking down that imaginary dark path in our mind where danger lurks at every turn. It is imagining the bad things that will happen in the future, which creates fear. However, the other way that this word is used is seen in vv. 31-32. In v. 31 we are told, “do not worry” about food, drink, clothing. Then in v. 32 Jesus says, “for the pagans run after all these things.” Here worry is better translated as “concern” or “preoccupation” or “passion”. (This is its meaning in 1 Cor. 7.) The pagans are preoccupied with obtaining these things and we are not to be preoccupied with them. It doesn’t only mean fear or anxiety but what it is that we are preoccupied with, what consumes our time and attention, what we are passionate about. So when Jesus commands us not to worry he is commanding us to not be afraid or anxious about the necessities of life and not to be preoccupied with them.

2. In v. 25 why does Jesus tell us not to worry about food, drink, and clothing, i.e. “daily bread”?

He says that life is more important than these things.

3. What does that mean?

God has given you life and given you your body. You did not give these things to yourself. You did not create yourself, not your life or your body. Every sane person knows this but hardly anyone ever thinks about it. You and I had absolutely nothing to do with our own creation. God, before time began, decided that you would exist at this time and in this place with these parents and this life situation. Then God created you through your parents at exactly the precise moment he intended to do so. Existence is a gift.

When God gave you life and when God gave you a body, why did he do it? Did he give you life so you could spend all your time trying to gratify the sensual pleasures that you have? If you get three square meals a day will you be living out the purpose for which God made you? If you eat the best food, sleep in the softest beds, drink the finest wines, will you have fulfilled the purpose for which God gave you life? If you wear the most fashionable clothes, the most stunning jewelry, will you have used your body for the purposes for which God gave it to you?

Life is not about living a comfortable, secure life on earth. God did not make us to be consumers and possessors. Life is about so much more than what you eat and what you wear and what you drive and where you live and where you vacation. Now Jesus doesn’t tell us what life is about or why God gave us a body in this verse. That’s still coming. He does tell us here that having enough to eat or the highest quality of food or dressing in style or having a wife and children or a successful career is not why God made us and so if that’s what you’re concerned about, you are definitely not concerned about God’s purposes for life.

4. How does asking God to give us our daily bread help us to remember that “life is more important than food and the body more important than clothing”?

If every day I ask God to give me my daily bread then I won’t fall into the trap of believing that to have food, clothing and shelter is what life is about. I will ask my father for what I need and then forget about it because he will give me what I need. If he doesn’t give it to me, then I don’t need it because he is my father in heaven who knows what I need before I ask him. If I don’t ask him daily for what I need to live then I am going to be living to obtain these things. In other words I will act as though life consists in having food, clothing, shelter, etc. You are either praying for daily bread or living life in pursuit of daily bread.

Worry withers when we ask God for our daily bread while perceiving his purpose.

5. In v. 26 Jesus commands us to look at birds. When we watch birds what do we discover? What do they do and what don't they do?

Birds don't till the ground or plant seeds or harvest grain or store their grain in barns, yet they never go hungry. God always makes sure they have enough to eat. But how does God do this? Birds do not simply sit still and open their beaks and food pours in, with no effort on their part. I love chickadees. There is no greater experience in life than to be standing in the woods on a frosty morning in November and to have a flock of 4 or 5 chickadees land on the trees around you. They hop from branch to branch, making their song, cocking their heads from side to side, pecking at the bark on the twigs and branches to shake loose sleeping insects. They are very methodical about it, going up one side of the tree and down the other. What they don't do is sit still on a branch immobilized by the fear that when they hop from twig to twig, they won't find any food. What they don't do is lust after the bugs their fellow chickadees are eating. What Jesus is telling me is that when I see these chickadees flitting from branch to branch, eating insects, God is feeding them. God is providing for them. Their efforts to find insects is successful because God causes them to work and he makes sure they find the bugs.

6. What is the argument Jesus is making when he asks, "are you not much more valuable than they?"

The personal, creator God made all that exists and made man in his image to represent him and to rule over and care for creation. According to Genesis 1 we human beings are the pinnacle of creation as we are the only creatures made in the image of God. Jesus knows that God made the world and everything in it and that he made mankind as his representative and steward over his creation and so he argues, if he takes such good care of birds, which you rarely think about, won't he take care of you?

7. How does v. 27 relate to v. 26? What is the argument Jesus is making?

What Jesus is pointing to here is that just as you have no control over the time of your birth so you have no control over the time of your death. God controls both. Worry and anxiously striving to eliminate all risk from your

life will not add a single moment to the length of life that God has ordained for you. Spending your life absorbed with obtaining the pleasures of this world will not keep you from dying. One of the things you discover from watching birds is that they die. So we too will one day die and our anxious striving will not alter that fact. Now, Jesus is not teaching a passive fatalism here. Birds seek food and find safe nesting places and fly south for the winter and roost in good cover. But they don't add to the life God has given to them by worrying. God has an appointed time for your death and your children's death and you cannot alter it by anxious risk management. We are way more valuable than birds for whom God provides and over whose life and death he rules, so relax in his care.

8. What do we discover when we look at flowers?

We discover that with no effort on their part they are more attractive and beautiful than the most well-dressed people in the world. Solomon, to a Jewish person, was the height of wealth, fashion and style. To live like Solomon was the Jewish daydream, just like to live like some celebrity is the daydream of millions of people in the world. Yet, for all their style and "coolness", they cannot compare to the beauty of a simple flower. And the flower put forth no effort to get such beauty. God merely clothed it with beauty as an expression of his grace and creativity. We also discover they are very temporary, lasting for days or weeks and then cut down and burned up. Jesus' argument is pretty straight forward, if God clothes flowers, which are so temporary, with such beauty, won't he make sure that you have enough clothing? If he takes such good care of such insignificant things as flowers, most of which are never seen and without any effort on their part, won't he take good care of you?

9. What does worry about food and drink and the style of your clothes and obsession with minimizing risk tell us about our hearts according to the end of v. 30?

All of this worry about and pursuit of food and risk free living and style shows a heart that doesn't trust God. All of our anxiety shows that we believe we are on our own, that it is up to us to provide and protect. Really, our anxiety is a form of pride. We believe that our work creates wealth and minimizes risk. When we worry we treat God with contempt and put him on the margins of our lives and act as if he has nothing to do with what we have or don't have. So Jesus commands us to look at God's creation and think about how God takes care of it. The creation is preaching to us that God is

an excellent provider and in absolute control of everything. So we should relax and trust him and quit living in such anxiety and stress.

10. Is it wrong to dress “in style”? Why or why not?

It is not wrong to dress in style it is wrong to be obsessed with dressing in style.

11. How is asking God to provide our daily bread the antidote to worry?

The primary way we express this dependence upon God and our lack of worry is by asking him to provide our daily bread just as he provides for the birds and clothes the flowers. We ask him to provide and protect so that we do not live as though our work is providing and protecting. We work but free of fear and pride and greed.

Worry withers when we ask God for our daily bread while pondering his providential care of the world.

12. According to vv. 31-32 why is worry so bad?

Jesus says that this kind of frantic worry or passionate obsession is wrong for two reasons. First, when you worry, you are acting like a non-Christian who is living only for what he can get out of this life. When we worry we are acting as though the only thing that matters is what we eat and what we wear. The non-believer lives for life in this world and when we worry we are declaring that the only life that matters is the one right here. Worry proves that what we are running after is money and the life that money can give us. Second, when you worry you are treating your heavenly Father with contempt. Parents, how would you feel if you discovered in your child's room a box full of food that your child was hoarding. When you asked them why, he says, “I just know you're going to quit feeding me and so I'm storing up food to eat when you quit fixing meals for me.” Or how would you feel if your child complained non-stop about the food you gave her and the clothes you provided and the home she lived in? When children worry about their next meal or complain about the quality of your provision does it not call into question your character and your love? That 's exactly what we do when we worry and complain. That is exactly what we do when we don't pray. Asking God to give us our daily bread is the primary expression of our

faith that he is, through Jesus, our loving Father who knows what we need and is eager to provide all we need.

13. According to v. 33 what are we to “worry” about?

We are to be preoccupied with and to seek God's kingdom and his righteousness.

14. What does this mean?

It means I believe that belonging to the kingdom of God is the best thing in the universe. It means that I am concerned that more and more people come under his rule. It makes me happy to see others living in submission to Christ and so I use my time and resources to help others understand who king Jesus is and why it is a good thing to submit to him. To seek God's kingdom is to care about missions and about missionaries. It is to care about whether my children and my family and my neighbors are going to live in the kingdom of God. There are two ways to think about the righteousness of God. First, the righteousness of God is that righteousness he gives to every believing sinner for the sake of Christ. It is to be justified, to be declared not guilty but perfectly righteous by God as a gift of his grace. We seek that righteousness by trusting in Jesus' life, death and resurrection for us. We seek the righteousness that God gives through Christ by resting in his work for us, not laboring to gain God's favor by our efforts. Second, we seek the righteousness of God when we seek to live as Jesus teaches us to live. We believe that to belong to Christ and to live like him in this world is infinitely better than obtaining all the pleasures this world can provide.

15. How does asking God to provide my daily bread relate to seeking God's kingdom and righteousness?

When we pray that God give us our daily bread we recognize that what God gives is what we need. We are not looking for a certain amount of stuff but to have the stuff we need to glorify his name. Prayer for daily bread keeps us fixed upon his kingdom and righteousness, not the daily bread, because we are trusting him to give us what we need, we are not frantically trying to provide ourselves with what we need.

Worry withers when we ask God for our daily bread while pursuing his promise.