

## Fed By Grace | Food in the Gospels

“Daily Bread”

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Luke 11.1-13

3.3.13

*It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." <sup>2</sup> And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. <sup>3</sup> 'Give us each day our daily bread. <sup>4</sup> 'And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.'" <sup>5</sup> Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; <sup>6</sup> for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; <sup>7</sup> and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' <sup>8</sup> "I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. <sup>9</sup> "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup> "For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. <sup>11</sup> "Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? <sup>12</sup> "Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? <sup>13</sup> "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Luke 1.1-13)*

We're in the middle of a series in which we look at food in the Gospels. We're not getting recipes or but we DO find that food plays a prominent role.

Today we move from food events where Jesus Christ ate with colorful characters – some with notoriously bad reputations and He also ate with some who really hated Him... but always... great discussions!

Today, though, we look at food as a symbol ...food as a teaching device. There are 23 parables in this Gospel of Luke and they almost always have *something* to do with food. Sometimes food is sort of *incidental to the story* and other times *it's the central symbol or image*.

Here, food is among the things for which we're told to pray... "Give us this day our daily bread" AND food is then used in the two parables that follow, the neighbor who comes at midnight (looking for food) and evil fathers who still give good food *when their children ask*.

This section is, of course, a teaching about spiritual practice, specifically about prayer. And IN this teaching, Jesus Christ uses food as an image to tell us about prayer. Every religion has some form of prayer (even Buddhism which is essentially atheistic, has forms of prayer) but, Jesus Christ's approach to prayer is really NOT to focus on what religions have in common (re: prayer) but to introduce something radically different from what any religion means by this practice. So let's look at it, 1) A Different Way to Pray 2) A Different Reason to Pray 3) Different Results in Praying

It would probably be very difficult to find any person who really believed in prayer who was satisfied with his or her practice of prayer. If I asked for a show of hands I'm not sure if anyone would say, "Yes! I'm happy with how much I pray and how effectively I pray (unless, of course, you don't believe in prayer or God at all – you don't pray...and you're fine with that.)

And if we asked, why...asked...well what's keeping you from the practice of prayer you want to have or that you think you should have? I think most people would say EITHER, "I don't know how...don't know what to say..." OR "I don't make it a priority... I let other things get in the way...I guess I don't think prayer is really as important as I say it is...I'm not motivated."

I think that's what it boils down to: either I don't know how (need instruction) or I do know how but I don't do it (need motivation).

We want to know how to pray (instruction) AND we want to actually be able to do it...because it may be possible to know HOW and yet ...not be able to keep it up...not be able to develop a practice of praying.

Apparently, there was something about *the way Jesus Christ prayed* that provoked admiration or at least curiosity from his students...And as they were coming to think of Him as a rabbi...and a great rabbi...they wanted Him to do what all the great rabbis did for their students...to sort of pass on the secret, magic, grandiose, impressive prayers that ONLY great spiritual masters could ever compose.

And when they ask, “Teach us to pray!” Jesus answers BOTH our issues – the model prayer (1<sup>st</sup> paragraph) is the instruction and the two little stories are the motivation.

In the model prayer, Jesus gives a very different approach...not this magic formula or perfect eloquence and majesty. It’s first, very simple, only 38 words in the original language. Children can learn it.

Is it to be repeated...over and over again?...No (Jesus actually taught against mindless repetition in prayer Matthew 6.7)...It’s simple, not as a formula but as a seed...it suggests all the big categories that can be unfolded in prayer. It grows and expands. It primes the pump for an infinite number of prayers in all these different categories.

Second, not only SIMPLE (like a seed) but it’s ROOTED like a tree. It’s rooted in a view of God. It’s fixated on this God and King Who ought to be recognized and admired. Every beauty or pleasure we ever encounter in this life is like a faint echo of Him. We may say a thing is beautiful but He is Beauty itself...and this prayer wants that reality to be recognized. “Hallowed be Thy Name”.

Finally, we could say SIMPLE (like a seed) ROOTED in God (like a tree) and thirdly FRUITFUL (like a grove). It’s a prayer deeply aware of others. “Give US this day OUR daily bread...Forgive US OUR sins...for we also forgive others...”

Eugene Peterson makes a sharp distinction between solitude and privacy. There’s a place for solitude in prayer (where we withdraw from others in order to listen better and be engaged more deeply) but privacy is getting away from others so I don’t have to be bothered by them. And in this way...there’s no such thing as a private prayer. “We can no more pray a private prayer than we can speak a private language” (*Earth and Altar*, p. 16). We are bearing fruit together like trees in a grove...common soil and all interconnected...One God over all...and all people with common needs, facing common dangers.

OK...so if that’s how I pray...using this seed prayer (simple, rooted in God and praying always with others in mind...like an orchard) if that’s the instruction I need...HOW DO I KEEP IT UP? How do I develop a practice of prayer?

Well, the big idea here is TRUST...to trust in a God who is mighty over all...who is the essence of power and beauty ...for whose unveiling the whole universe LONGS – Thy Kingdom Come is our greatest need...

BUT this same Almighty King is also a Father to be trusted. That's really the big idea of the whole passage. You think that God is like a stingy, sleepy, grouchy neighbor (and even if that's what He is...it would still make sense to bug Him 'til He answers) and you think God is one of those grumpy, domineering, bossy jerks such as we sometimes find in families to this very day (though I remind you: even the worst kinds of fathers still feed their kids when the kids ask for food – so it would STILL make sense to ask God for your needs!) “BUT”, says Jesus Christ, “the true God I come to reveal is like NONE OF THESE CHARACTERS... He is better than a grouchy neighbor...in fact better than a good neighbor...HE'S A FATHER...and not a mean, bossy father but a totally loving, attentive, wise, perfect Father... better than the earthly ideal.

This idea has to figure big in your prayers...it's gotta be the first word, “Father, hallowed be Your name...” and this thought has to permeate the whole prayer and be the prevailing attitude.

“I know,” says Jesus Christ, “you look around in this fallen world and THINK you see evidence to the contrary...see evidence that God is an evil father (like we are...imperfect and short tempered...sometimes spoiling our children and sometimes mean)...YOU THINK the apparent delay in answered prayer means that God is asleep...or can't be bothered... but I am here to tell you...here to show you...despite the APPARENT evidence...the Holy, Holy, Holy God loves you deeply...like a perfect Father.”

Much of the evidence you think you see...is NOT what it appears to be...LOOK at Me...soon you will see...ROCK SOLID, undeniable, irrefutable evidence that God is the perfect Father...

I, His eternal Son, His spitting image, the apple of his eye, the One He cherishes with a brightness and heat that surpasses all the stars and super-novas combined...HE WILL PART WITH ME...in order to have YOU.

He will make His enemies...into His own sons and daughters in the moment that I am clothed with your guilt...when your rebellion is charged to ME... when I pray to the Father... and call Him not “Abba... Papa...” but I will lose the privilege of that address and will call Him the generic, “My God, My God...”

In that moment, when I am forsaken by the One with Whom I am One...I will give away My eternal status to YOU...and you will no longer be sinners but sons.

God the Father is that serious about having YOU as His own beloved children... He will punish Me IN YOUR PLACE.

“And from now on...whenever you find yourself asking, ‘Why is God not answering? Is He asleep like a bad neighbor? Is He corrupt and mean like a cruel father?’... in the moment, you THINK you have this evidence...let My cross be the lens through which you see... THIS delay is NOT meant to hurt you and it will in fact help you and heal you. The Almighty Father brings good...even out of death...watch me... look at My Cross and you’ll see that it’s so.”

This GOOD thing that you’re sure you should have... you just “KNOW” a loving Father would WANT you to have... in that moment the Cross tells you, “Father knows best...only trust Him...only trust Him.”

What are the new results Jesus Christ’s way of praying has in mind? Well, while every form of spirituality uses prayer to pry blessings out of the hand of a stingy deity or to get the universe to favor you...or to get advantages...or blessings...or salvation, Jesus Christ’s way of prayer doesn’t aim at blessings from God...it aims at God Himself.

He is saying to everyone who dares trust Him, “I have given you My status...I have been crushed in your place...nothing stands between you and the Father! HE IS THE GREAT BLESSING YOU WANT, and NEED AND FOR WHICH YOUR HEART TRULY HUNGERS!

Why settle for the blessings of God when you can have God Himself...can be tenderly at rest in Him, can know Him as the perfect Father?

People say, “Prayer changes things” and prayer does change things...but prayer REALLY changes us! It awakens us to TRUST. And when we trust, when we are seeing the world, even really tough stuff through the story of the Cross (and that becomes MY story...how I know that God loves me as the Perfect Father sacrificially loves His children) when I’m seeing through that lens then a crust of bread becomes cake...becomes a feast.

Without that, though, even a huge abundance of stuff is never enough...our souls were not made for stuff. Our souls will be restless until they find their rest in God...and that will only happen to the degree that we receive and enjoy the Sonship Jesus Christ gave us and only to the degree we KNOW and TRUST God as our Father.

Pray.