

Bread: The Ultimate Necessity

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[0 : 00] This is the third in a series of talks on the Lord's Prayer, and we're today at the, you know, I tried to do, Lord, teach us to pray, and then last week, hallowed be thy name, and thy kingdom come.

I don't know whether I told you this or not, but it sort of stuck in my mind that the nature of that prayer, thy kingdom come, is such that were it to be answered, it would create a cosmic catastrophe, because all the other kingdoms would have to give way to that kingdom. So you're not just sort of praying for a modification of the constitution, or anything like that. You're praying for something which is, and in that sense, it might be regarded as subversive. So, the, if this were, you know, just to, if this were the kingdom, what, what today's talk is about is how this loaf of bread relates to this ultimate cosmic catastrophe. And, and while you might call it a cosmic catastrophe, it's a, it's a catastrophe that's badly needed in our world.

[1 : 48] So, what the, what the, the prayer is, is simply, give us this day our daily bread. And, and, you don't need to think about it.

It seems so painfully obvious. When, J.B. Phillips translates it, give us each day the bread we need, which it modifies it slightly, and I think puts more of a, an edge on it.

One of the commentators, taking some liberties to paraphrase it, says, give us day by day the bread sufficient for our existence, not what is superfluous.

A very important principle, you know. I, I, I became a bit conscious of the fact that I am talking to you now, and I suppose within a mile of here, there is a hundred restaurants in which you could get superfluities beyond your wildest imagination, in terms of daily bread.

And it's, I suppose it's part of the sophisticatedness of a city like ours. But the, the, the essential statement is, all I want is bread, and all I need is for today.

[3 : 14] And that, you know, that's, uh, implicit in that statement is, a continuing daily dependence upon the source of the bread.

That it's, it, that's the way it works. Now, the way we work is, uh, I have laid up for myself bread, which is going to cover me for the next 20 years or so.

Uh, and so I won't pray till the end of that 20 years. But, uh, what this prayer is meant to do is to, uh, awaken in you and me, the necessity of that daily dependence upon, uh, the source, uh, of, of our daily bread.

So it's, uh, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray this way. And when they pray this way, uh, they are, uh, they're saying, uh, they're expressing a personal need.

Uh, you know, one of the reasons you say grace at meals is because yesterday you said, give us bread.

[4 : 33] And today, when you sit down for supper, you say, for what we have received. Thank you. You know, that you prayed for it.

It's been given. You say, thanks. That's just completing the arrangement. So that it's, uh, it's very much a, a sense of personal dependence upon God.

It's a sense of immediate need. That is, it's not that we can delay, uh, our need till some other time, but, uh, that, that, that need is, is here.

And now it's an immediate kind of need. It's, uh, it's a perpetual need. It will go on as long as you live, that you will require your daily bread.

And I can't, I, you know, I'm, as I say, getting very elderly and I can't get, I can't remember it. You were supposed to laugh. I, uh, uh, uh, uh, I can't remember the time when I, uh, you know, I didn't, uh, I went without food.

[5 : 44] I, uh, it expresses a universal need in that you have this in common with everybody. There is nobody you will meet this day who doesn't stand in need of daily bread.

So that it gives you a wonderful bond in terms of common humanity. Now you may be enormously different in how you acquire it and what you end up with, the recipe by which you prepare it, but the basic universal need is there and bonds you to everybody else who has that need.

And it is a material need. You know, it's not spiritual. It's, uh, the bread that you can take in your hand and break and eat in great chunks.

That's, that's what it is. And, and then that is necessary. And that's at the heart of the prayer of Christ's disciple, that he will have that material provision made.

And that he will recognize that the source of that material provision is a heavenly father. He's living in that kind of relationship so that it's, uh, it's that kind of material need.

[7 : 07] Well, if you, uh, if you, I mean, there, there is a sense in which you can say that the whole economic machinery by which our world lives, uh, consists almost entirely in making that bread available, you know, from the great, uh, trains with the grain carriers that come in from the prairies.

And, uh, uh, and they come into Vancouver and Vancouver is a harbor. And Vancouver is the place where you transfer the grain onto the boat. And the boats take it around the world and the, uh, and to mills around the world.

And then it's milled. And then it's, uh, uh, it's, it's sold on the futures market or some other kind of market. I don't know what they are, the stock market. And, uh, and then it's, uh, then it, it goes to the great bakeries and the bakeries mix it and make the dough and produce the bread.

And the bread goes out through all the city traffic to various little stores and people come to the stores. And in some miraculous way, millions upon millions of people consider that it is just something that happens that you go to the store and you put a buck on the table and walk away with a loaf of bread.

And, uh, the whole of our world, in a sense, depends on that process, interest rates, taxation, banks, airlines, shipping, armies, all of them are really in order that that process of daily bread can go on in our material world.

[8 : 48] So that, uh, what the, the end result of it is, if I can do it, uh, I don't know whether I, this, this is, uh, I heard, I heard an interesting thing the other day, you know, uh, I was at a clergy, I was talking to, uh, uh, an older clergyman.

Yeah. He really was. He's been retired for five years. but, uh, he said, I remember back in the 60s, he said, uh, the, the family was the focus of all the problems in our society.

you know, you know, you know, you know, the, you know, your relationship to your father, your sister, your mother, your brother, your grandfather, it was all a problem. And now he says, the family is, uh, is the focus of all that our society mostly needs.

He says, he's seen that switch take place. And I just said that by way of apologizing for drawing this picture, which, uh, you may think is inaccurate, but what it, what it, the purpose of this picture really is to say to you, uh, uh, I, I suppose you can do it.

That human existence culminates in people in relationship to one another sitting around a table with, uh, walls to protect them from wild animals and a roof to protect them from the element and sharing a loaf of bread.

[10 : 33] That's the, in a sense, the pinnacle of human civilization to be able to do that. And it's basically, uh, I suppose you would have to say not only the right, but almost the necessity that everybody should have that built into their life, where they have people to whom they relate.

They have bread, which provides for their most basic kind of needs. They have shelter, and that process goes on so that you, you see it, uh, you see it at work.

Uh, and, uh, it may be, it may be a bowl of rice instead of a loaf of bread, but, but basically that happens the world over. And when you pray, give us this day, our daily bread, bread, you're saying, Lord, make this process happen on a continuing basis.

And it's why when it does happen, and when you gather with your family around the table and share a loaf of bread, that basically you are doing the thing, which is at the heart of the whole of our civilization.

every government in the world, its chief goal is to be able to provide that for people. When Martin Luther translated, give us this day our daily bread, he said, it means, give us a home to live in, a neighborhood made up of good neighbors, a spouse with whom we can get along, children that are

relatively well behaved, magistrates that are honest, and he went on like that and said, that's what it means when you say, give us this day our daily bread, allow this to happen somewhere in our lives. [12:24] And, uh, so we, uh, we do it. Now, I, I tell you that, and now I'm going to read an article from the Manchester Guardian, and it's the kind of article I hate reading by myself, because I feel so depressed at the end of it, and so guilty, and so inadequate, and so powerless, and so, and so I thought it would be better if we all felt that way together.

But just listen, it's a, it's, it's a dreadful story. But it relates to this. Uh, this is, uh, from Somali. From every dark, painless window, from every doorway, down every street in the town, the skeletal, rag-draped, bought people, stare as they wander, starving among the rubble.

In the space of a month, this city has gone from a recognizable town, hit by famine, to being a camp, where dead bodies are as much a part of the rubble, as the homes destroyed by civil war. The streets are silent. Children's whose age and sex are impossible to identify, drift around. Too weak to beg, or talk, or react to anything.

[13:50] Upon the fire-charred bricks of a ruined building, the dead body of a young man lies spread eagle. On the main road to the hospital, an old man lies dead, clutching a walking stick.

Beside him lies another old man. He's dead, too. A hand reaches out from beneath a colorful shawl, just a hand held out for whatever might be placed in it by whoever is passing.

But the people who are passing are dying, too. A few weeks ago, there were some healthy-looking people in the city, which lies 140 miles northeast of Mogadishu.

The contrast then between the living and the dying was stark and showed the awful injustice of a famine which allowed some children to play in the streets with toy guns made of wood or metal, while beside them refugees from the villages lay in the sand, dying.

But now the children have stopped their games, and few faces are without marks of hunger and exhaustion. Faces of people too weak to continue, stare from every direction as you pass.

[15:11] In the shadow of a wall, at the by-projects camp, a baby lies curled up peacefully on a sheet. Its mother is preparing to bury it.

Flies hover around a 30-year-old man lying nearby, dead less than an hour. In this camp, 70 people a day are dying.

In this city, its normal population of 30,000 swell to at least 60,000 by displaced people from surrounding villages. There are about 500 deaths a day.

The situation is worse than anything I have ever seen, said Phoebe Fraser, administrator in the town for United States Relief Organization, Care International. Once the rain comes in the next week or two, it will be worse.

The shelter in the town is appalling, and the displaced people are in an appalling condition. Two U.S. Air Force transports, which began an emergency airlift of food into this city at the weekend, were greeted at the town's airfield by local politicians.

[16:22] They're accompanying gunmen and a handful of demonstrators carrying signs in English and Arabic saying, Foreign Army, no. Food, yes.

Abdi Warsami Isaac, whose Somali national monument, movement, is aligned with one of the country's main warlords, General Mohammed aided, welcomed the U.S. airlift but said that his fighters should be left to arrange security for relief food, not the 3,000 United Nations troops proposed to protect the aid shipments.

It would be too much having thousands of foreign troops, Mr. Warsami said. In this city, the security is improving.

It's getting better. Just before the U.S. planes landed, carrying 19 tons of maize flour, a gun battle in the town, had left one man dead.

Soon after an argument at the airfield's entrance saw two teenage gunmen pointing AK-47 rifles at each other. Under its 10 million emergency operation in Somalia, the U.S. has so far airlifted 300 tons of food into the country and sent 1,600 tons to Somali refugees in northern Kenya.

[17:51] Since August 28, there have been 31 U.S. relief flights. Another 145,000 tons of U.S. food is to be sent only after the beginning of the U.S. financial year in October.

The U.S. hands over its food to the relief agencies operating in the city, considered the most insecure town so far reached by the airlift operation, and relies on gunmen hired by the agencies to ensure that the food is not so stolen or sold.

While more food has arrived in the past month than in the previous month, due mainly to airlifts by the United Nations Children's Fund, the delivery of extra food has coincided with the arrival of hundreds of more refugees in the town.

The U.N. special envoy to Somalia said last week that Somali crisis was much worse than we had previously thought. As relief agencies visit more villages, they are finding people who have died in their houses or are waiting to die, too weak to travel to where food is now being delivered. Every time the scale of the crisis is assessed and more food arrives, the need becomes greater and the desperation grows worse.

[19 : 19] People think that this is just another African famine, said Phoebe Fraser, but it's not. Well, I guess I didn't feel I could talk about this, give us this day our daily bread.

And without reading something like that, of which there's an abundance of articles, and recognizing that you can't, you can't say that prayer without including the Somalis in the us, give us this day our daily bread.

Recognizing the whole of human dependence upon a God who provides the basic material necessities on which life is based.

You can't separate that. And, but it's interesting, you see, because in this process of creating this kind of health unit where there is a family or a group of people relating to one another and sharing the material necessities of life around that process.

You can go right back to the beginnings of the scriptures and see where, you know, when Adam and Eve sinned and the Lord said to Adam, you will eat bread by the sweat of your brow.

[20 : 56] That somehow this is not going to be provided. You're going to have to work. The method of production, you are alienated from the bread and it's only by your work that you're going to overcome that alienation.

Something is seriously wrong with the fact that though there is enough bread in the world, there is no way to deliver it where it's needed.

There's something basically wrong. And, I mean, you can see in that story how it goes wrong. So, it's very interesting when you go from there to the first chapters of the gospel according to St. Luke and Satan comes along with the solution and goes to Jesus and says, turn these stones into bread and the problem is answered.

And, you know, and Christ says to him, man cannot live by bread alone.

[22 : 14] That won't answer the problem. That the need is deeper than that. Man has to live, in Matthew it says, by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

There is a conscious dependence upon God and a conscious stewardship of what God has given. And you can't separate.

and you can't, you can't solve the problem by turning stones into bread.

And there seems to be an apparent contradiction when you get, when you get to the story in John chapter 6 of Jesus feeding the 5,000 and taking the gift of bread and blessing it and distributing it. And there's a great deal of emphasis put on the process of distributing by the disciples. They got the bread out and people ate it.

[23 : 24] And there was enough for everybody because we read that 12 baskets full of fragments were picked up. And so that went on.

And in a sense, the people that were there and received that bread were very grateful and said, this is the solution.

Everybody has eaten. Bread has been delivered. Our daily bread has been provided. But then dust came and night followed and in the morning they were hungry again.

And so they went looking for Jesus. And when they found him, they confronted him.

And he said to them, you're looking for me now, not because you saw my sign, but because you ate the food and had all that you wanted.

[24 : 32] You should not work for the food which does not last, but for the food which lasts on until eternal life.

And he talked about himself being the bread of God. And they said to them, except you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no part with me.

And so what Jesus does is he welds together the necessity of being in communication with God with the necessity of the material provision of bread.

and he says, you can't tear them apart. And everybody has tried to tear them apart. And, you know, the agonizing futility of flying tons and tons of food into a country like Somalia where the distribution system has broken down and it's all arrived too late.

And the restoration of this kind of thing in that kind of country is going to take years and years and years of commerce and of agriculture and of industry and of work and of fertilizer and a hundred things before this can happen.

[26 : 09] And you see, what happens in the New Testament is you get this breakdown in which the expectation of people is, God, whoever you are, and we don't much care, make sure that there's bread to eat.

And God's answer is, there is bread to eat when you can hear the word I speak. And it can affect your life.

And that was, in fact, the division that took place in John chapter 6. Because as Jesus went on and said, God has a word for you and that word is to be the source of your life.

Not just here and now, but you're the source of your eternal life. And they said, we don't want that. We just want the bread here and now. But you see, you can't tear them apart. You can't separate. And Jesus, Jesus, I mean, it says in John chapter 6 those very poignant words that from that time many of the disciples didn't follow him any longer.

[27 : 42] And of course, our world is divided about Jesus because they say what's needed is bread. That's what our world needs.

And what Jesus says is you can't do it. You can't separate that from receiving the word of God, from receiving me because I am the bread whom God has provided to meet your need.

And the whole New Testament is built on that. well, that's the picture that's there.

And so when you're saying, as Jesus teaches us to say, give us day by day the bread sufficient for our existence because our day by day existence is dependent upon you.

And we want to live in that day by day dependence upon you for our bread and that day by day communication with you, our God, through the word that you have sent us, which is Jesus Christ.

[29 : 09] And that you can't separate those. and we have tried and tried to do it. And we insist that we have the right to do it.

But Jesus says simply you can't do it. You know, I mean, you've heard a million times as I have, there's no use them going to some gospel mission and getting the Bible preached at them.

They need bread. They need bread. And of course, that's what destroys the gospel mission because it then becomes a bread factory and it doesn't meet the need, the basic human need, which is for the word of God and of which bread is an expression of the care and love and concern that God has for all of us.

in Somalia and in Vancouver. Let me pray. Let me pray. Our God, we feel the wisdom of Satan in saying turn the stones into bread.

And we just pray that you by your Holy Spirit will show us the infinitely more profound wisdom of our Lord Jesus who says you can't live by bread alone.

[30 : 55] You need the word from God. And so as our bellies are hungry for bread, Lord, make our hearts hungry for that word, which alone can satisfy us, which you have spoken to us in Jesus Christ.

In his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.