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Matthew 6:9 - 6:10 (Part 4)



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this lesson, Steve Gregg continues his teachings on the Lord's Prayer portion of Chapter 6 of the Gospel of Matthew. He emphasizes the idea that as a Christian disciple, one does not own oneself or one's possessions, and that one should focus on eternal matters and the will of God. While it is acceptable to ask God for things, one should not neglect important issues or pray for comfort and luxury. Gregg advises that one should trust in God to provide for what is needed today and in the future, without storing up goods.

Transcript

Today we'll be continuing our study in the Sermon on the Mount, and particularly in that portion in Chapter 6 of Matthew, which is the Lord's Prayer, which we commonly call it. Actually, we will find some things in this prayer that Jesus himself, the Lord, would never pray, because the prayer does ask for forgiveness of sin, and we know that Jesus never needed to ask such a thing. This is not the prayer that Jesus prayed.

This is the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray. And as we have looked at it in the past several sessions, we have seen some things about prayer which are normative about Jesus teaching a prayer, even though it is not necessary to assume that Jesus intended for us to pray these exact words every time we pray. I don't suppose there is anything wrong with doing so, so long as we can still keep them meaningful after so many repetitions.

But it seems to me that Jesus is giving us a pattern prayer, which has all the elements of the right kind of praying, and all those elements put in their proper perspective and priorities. Let me read the prayer again. We have read it in its entirety each day since we have begun talking about it, but it is short, and it takes very little of our time, and it is helpful to see the whole thing in its proper perspective.

Jesus said in Matthew Chapter 6, in verse 9 through 13, In this manner, therefore, pray. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Amen. Now, we observed a few sessions ago that Jesus told us to direct our prayers to the Father, and gave some indication of the degree of reverence that we are to use in praying. That is suggested by the statement, hallowed be Your name.

We saw in another session, our last one I believe, that we are to pray first and foremost for the interests of God's kingdom. That prayer is not really a magic wand that we wave over our circumstances to make our lives easier. It is not the genie in the bottle that gives us three wishes, or as many as we would like, to make our lives happier.

The purpose of prayer is not to establish our own agendas or our own kingdom, but it is to establish the kingdom of God. Now, the kingdom of God is the reign of God over the hearts of men. And the first petition we saw last time in the prayer is, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

And we saw, therefore, that the first concern in prayer, in all prayer, even if we are not praying this specific prayer, what Jesus is saying is that when it comes to praying, the first thing that concerns us is that we invite God, ask God, beg God, to do His will on earth. To establish His kingdom, that His kingdom may spread and prosper on this earth. And that His will would be more fully done on the earth as a result of our praying than it was before we prayed.

Now, we talked about this last time. I'm tempted to go into it again, but we need to continue. There is a point at which we do pray about our own concerns.

Now, our own concerns really are tempered by the fact that we are not our own. The Christian disciple does not own himself or herself, does not even own his own possessions. Jesus said in Luke chapter 14, in verse 34, He said, If you do not forsake all that you have, you cannot be my disciple.

And we are told in 1 Corinthians chapter 6 that we are not our own. We've been bought with a price. That is the price of the blood of Jesus.

We have been purchased as slaves used to be purchased, and we are therefore property of God. Now, if anyone has objection to that, then what they object to is Christianity, not just my teaching. There are, of course, watered-down forms of Christianity that are sometimes pandered to the public and even represented officially in some of the churches, which do not take into consideration what Jesus said.

But the Christianity taught by Jesus is that we have a full surrender of all of our agendas, all of our priorities, all of our concerns, all of our wishes, all of our rights. When we come to Christ, we turn from a life of self to a life of God. That is, we are owned by God.

We are concerned about His interest, and He is concerned about ours because we are His servants. A master who owned slaves had every reason to wish for his slaves to be adequately clothed and fed and housed, and to see that their medical needs were met and so forth, because they were his property, really. They were his concern.

If a slave was sick, then that slave would be of little use to the master. If the slave had not had enough clothing or food, that slave would soon die. And therefore, a master has every interest in keeping the slave alive and healthy and provided for in terms of basic needs.

Now, when we come to God, it is not selfish to ask Him for the things we need. In fact, it is not even necessarily selfish to ask for the things that we desire. A servant can ask his master for something more than his basic needs, but of course, he is a servant asking his master.

Or in this case, the analogy is more like a child asking his father. Same kind of issue. The father cares about the children.

The master cares about his servant's needs. But the servant or the child comes with a petition that, knowing it is the master or the father who has the right to grant or to deny the petition, and if the petition is denied, the child who asks, or the servant who asks the master, must be prepared to say, Well, that's fine. I'm the servant.

I'm not the one who has the rights here. Now, Jesus does not indicate that it's wrong to pray for things that you need, things for yourself. I've heard people say, when I was talking to them, they'd say, Well, you know, my car is broken down.

I can't afford a new one. I don't know how I'm going to be getting to work. I can't afford to fix it.

And, you know, I say, Well, have you prayed that God will give you a better car? And I've had people respond to it, Oh, no, I would never ask God. I would never pray for something selfish, something for myself. Well, that may sound very commendable.

But the interesting thing is that many people will pray, I should say, will not pray for a thing because they would call it selfish, but they would work for it. That is to say, some people might feel like it would be selfish to ask that God would provide a car for them, or that God would help them to obtain a car in one way or another. And yet they would find nothing selfish about going out and working and earning money and paying for a car.

Now, the issue is, does God want you to have a car or not? If God does, there should be no reason why you should be averse to the idea of working for it and praying for it, if it's the will of God for you to have a car. If it is not the will of God for you to have a car, you should neither pray for it nor work for it, nor accept one if someone gives you one. You see, everything in the disciples' life has got to be seen in the light of what is the will of

God.

That was the first concern in the prayer. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And so, the issue is, what is God's will for me to have? If God wants me to have a car, then it is not selfish for me to pray that He'll provide one.

If God wants me to have an extra pair of shoes, it's not selfish for me to ask Him to provide one. That doesn't mean that I don't go out and work also. Because in the will of God, He may want me to work and obtain the money necessary to buy these things.

But the point is, there's not anything wrong with approaching God about things that you need. It simply is the case that our prayers should not be dominated by what we want, to the neglect of the more important issues of eternal matters, like the kingdom of God and God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In fact, all the remaining petitions here, give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, these are all things that we take to be God's will.

We've asked that God's will be done, and specifically, His will with reference to our physical and spiritual needs. Now, when I say, give us this day our daily bread, I'm talking about my physical needs. And as I said, it's not selfish to ask that you have your daily bread.

Notice what a modest proposal that is. Give us this day, our daily bread, that is our daily allotment. The idea here is not, give me today enough to make it through the next six months, or the next week even, but just give me today what I need today, my daily allotment.

Now, this of course, is praying for precise needs. It's not praying for prosperity. It is not praying for extra.

It's not praying for comfort or luxury. It's praying for what I need. I need a daily allotment of food.

And of course, in saying this, Jesus is, I think, authorizing us to pray for anything that is a legitimate need. I mean, bread, in this case of course, literally is food, but there are other things that we need every bit as much as we need food. We need water, we need clothing, we need shelter.

We have needs. And when Jesus authorizes us to pray for this, I believe that he is, you know, in one statement, our daily bread, signifying all things that we really need for which we ask God to provide. Thus, it is not contrary to the will of God for us to ask for things for ourselves.

But notice, having said that, how modest this asking is. Now, I personally believe that we

are entitled to ask God for as much as we believe God wants us to have. And, of course, when we have some opinion of how much God wants us to have, that should regulate our working and our spending and our saving as well as our praying.

That is to say, there are two ways, really, in which we are to cooperate with God to get things done. The thing that overshadows both of them is we are concerned about God's will. Therefore, we should not employ either of these two ways to acquire things that aren't his will.

Now, one of the ways that he has given us to accomplish things is to work. If he's given you health, if you have strong limbs, if you have a good mind, if you're capable of using what you have to get something done, to get a job done, to earn money, or to do some piece of work that needs to be done, that is one thing that God has given us to accomplish things that need to be done. Now, there are things that are beyond the range of our abilities to do.

And that being so, we also have another option. Besides working, we have prayer. Prayer is where we ask God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, but which we nonetheless believe is his will to be done.

Now, praying, therefore, doesn't just mean that we pray that God will take care of the missionaries, or that God will guide the president, or something like that. It means that we pray for our specific needs as well. And in doing so, we acknowledge our indebtedness to God and our dependency upon him.

Which expression of dependency, by the way, is good for us and pleases him? I believe that the Bible indicates that God is pleased to hear his children ask for things. Jesus said later on in Matthew 7 that even earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children when they ask them. And he says, how much more will your heavenly father give good things to his children when they ask him? I believe that God delights to be asked by his children for things that are good.

And it also is good for us, because the more we are left to asking for things, rather than taking care of everything for ourselves, the more our own dependency on God is established as a mindset, which is a good mindset to have. It certainly is the mindset that the Bible encourages. And so, to ask God for our daily bread does not mean we won't work for it, too.

It just means that we are asking that God will see to it that all things that we need, whether it's food, air, water, clothing, shelter, whatever is really needed, and this could be expanded depending on what God really wants you to be doing today. Does God want you to do something that requires driving a car? Then you better ask for a car if you don't have one. Does God want you to be doing something that requires equipment of some kind? A computer, a musical instrument? Who knows? I mean, whatever God wants

you to do, He also wants you to have all the necessary things to do it.

And therefore, for you to pray for those things is not selfish, so long as all that you are doing is committed to God in the first place. And you're doing this not to please yourself, but to please Him. Now, you might say, well, that's kind of placing a lofty motivation upon us, rather unnecessarily.

Well, it's not unnecessary. This is the normal Christian life. The normal Christian life is I have dined to myself, I've taken up my cross, I'm following Jesus, and my only concern now is what is His will for my life.

And once I have some sense of what His will is, you know, He wants me to work at this job, or He wants me to be a missionary, or He wants me to get married, or He wants me to go to college, or He wants me to do none of those things and has something else in mind, once I have a sense of what His will is, I then will have a sense of what things I need in order to accomplish His will. And when I know what those things are, there are two things I can do. I can work for it, and I can pray for it.

And the things I work for should be the same kinds of things I pray for. The difference being, of course, that I must necessarily pray for the things I can't accomplish through work. That doesn't mean I shouldn't also pray for the things that I can work for, because to work requires that I be in good health, requires that I have the opportunity, requires that I have enough food, enough energy, and so forth.

And so even working isn't something I can handle without God's provision. I need God's help, even for the things that I can do with His help. But there are some things that even with His help I can't do.

They're just beyond the range of my abilities or my opportunities. And that being so, I just need to pray about those and ask God to take care of it. Now, when He says, pray this, give us this day our daily bread, notice that this is what our concern is supposed to be with reference to material things.

My concern is for the things I need right now. Now, I won't deny that I may be concerned about the things I'm going to need next week or a month from now. And it is so often the case, at least in this country, I'm talking about the United States where there's so much prosperity, that God often has provided for us far more than we need just for today.

And that being so, we need to ask ourselves, why has God provided this surplus? Jesus said we should pray that God will give us our daily bread. And that being so, if God gives me only my daily allotment, that means I'll have to ask Him tomorrow for my daily allotment then, and likewise the next day and every day following. If God only provides me a daily ration of the things I need and nothing more, as by the way is the case in most countries.

I mean, we think of it as normal to have a surplus. That's only because of where we live in the world. Many parts of the world, people who pray for a daily allotment are very, very happy to get that.

Because it's not at all obvious where that will come from, apart from God's provision. But if God gives me only what I need today, that means I'll have to ask Him again tomorrow. And that's no doubt the very reason why God has said pray this way.

Give us our daily bread. You see, if God would give me all that I need today, enough for the next month, then I might not sense any need to pray to Him for another month until the things run out. You know, if God lays in my cupboards with all the food I need until next spring, then I might not have much motivation to cry out to Him and ask Him again before next spring.

And God does like to keep us close. He likes us to keep short accounts. He likes to keep us dependent.

And therefore, for Him to give us our daily bread is quite a good way for Him to keep us always looking to Him day by day, instead of giving us enough to store up forever. Now, we have an illustration of this in the Old Testament, of course, in the manna that God sent to the Israelites when they were wandering through the wilderness. In Exodus chapter 16, we read that God sent them only enough for one day at a time.

Except, of course, on Friday night, or Friday He gave them enough to make it through the Sabbath day, Saturday, so they wouldn't have to gather then. But apart from that exception, they could not store up manna. They had enough for each day, and if they tried to store it up, it would rot overnight.

So that God was enforcing a situation where they got their daily bread and no more. And this is very much like what Jesus tells the disciples to anticipate, that God will provide our daily bread, and not really necessarily more. Now, this doesn't mean that God will never provide more, but Paul did tell Timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 6, having food and clothing, we will with these things be content.

And why shouldn't we be content with them? Food and clothing is what we need. If God provides what we need, then we should be content. But what if I don't have anything laid up for tomorrow? Or the next day? Or my old age? Or my retirement? What about that? Shouldn't I lay up something for that? Well, Jesus didn't seem to know of any obligation to do such.

Jesus indicated that the God who provides for my daily food today, will be around tomorrow too, and He'll also be around in my old age. So that if I have a need then, I can ask Him for my daily bread then too. The reason that we store up for long-term needs, or imagined needs, or perceived needs, or possible needs, may very well be because of a

lack of faith on our part.

It could be that we are thinking that God will not provide in the future, as He has provided now, and therefore we have to make sure we provide for ourselves for the rest of our lives. Now, you see, there's two ways this can be viewed. This can be viewed as a responsible approach, or it could be viewed as lack of faith.

If we really think it's not God providing for us today, but it's really we're just providing for ourselves by working, if that's the way we view it, then we're going to be looking at a time down the road when we can't work anymore, and we won't be seeing God as our provider now, nor then. And, of course, we'll be worried about that, and we'll feel like our future is all in our hands. But on the other hand, if we are trusting God day by day for our daily bread now, and asking Him, give us this day our daily bread, then we will realize that each day, as long as God doesn't die, and He's incapable of doing that, as long as we're alive, we can always ask Him for our daily bread, and it'll always be provided as long as God wants us to have it.

The storing up of goods for old age is something that Jesus referred to when He told the story in Luke chapter 12 about the rich man whose barns couldn't even hold his crops. He was harvesting so much, so he built bigger barns. And he said, I'm going to take my ease for a few years, and just say, soul, you have much goods laid up for many years.

Take your ease. Eat, drink, and be merry. And Jesus said, God would say to him, you fool, this day your soul will be required of you.

And then who shall those things be that you've laid up for yourself? Remember, Jesus said, do not lay up for yourself treasures on earth, but lay up treasures in heaven. And the man who says, well, I've got treasures laid up for many years, I can take my ease now, is basically trying to cushion himself against future disaster with his own efforts and not trusting God. Now, the Bible does indicate that the ant is wise.

In Proverbs it tells us we should consider the ant and its ways and how it lays up in the summer to have enough for the winter. But, of course, that's not the same thing as laying up for retirement. If you're a farmer and you know that you're not going to be able to harvest crops between now and next summer, then, of course, you better store up this summer for the winter.

I mean, that's just normal foresight. That's what the ant does. Joseph did something similar when he knew that there was a famine coming.

But that was not storing up for old age. That was not looking at the time ahead and saying, I don't know if God will provide for me. It was rather a wise management of what God had given at this time.

And God did provide extra in the seven fat years so that Joseph could feed the world,

really, during the seven lean years. Likewise, there's nothing wrong with putting aside something for the immediate future if God has provided in advance and if you know there's a need coming up. If you know you've got a bill to pay at the end of this month and you have the money for it today, but you think, well, I shouldn't hold on to this because it's not trusting God, I don't think there's anything wrong with holding on to it until the end of the month or whatever to pay the bill.

However, if God has provided a tremendous surplus, far more than you could justly say you're going to be needing, then you might need to give some of that away to the kingdom of God. We'll continue this tomorrow. We've just run out of time today.