

Acknowledging God's Provision

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, take up your Bibles and we're going to read together in the Scriptures in the New Testament in Matthew's Gospel. In two places this evening, we're going to read in a moment in Matthew chapter 6, a passage we've been studying, the Lord's Prayer.
- That's page 811 if you have one of our blue Bibles. But if you'd like to stick your finger in there and then turn a few pages further on to Matthew chapter 18. And first we're going to read some words of the Lord Jesus from Matthew 18 and verse 21.
- Matthew 18 and then back to Matthew chapter 6. Matthew 18, 21, we're told Peter came up and said to Jesus, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him?
- As many as seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.
- Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.
- [1 : 1 5] And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold with his wife and children and all that he had and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees imploring him, have patience with me and I will pay you everything.
- And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants, owed him a hundred denarii, a hundred pennies.
- And seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, pay what you owe. So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him. Have patience with me and I will pay you.
- He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servant saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed.
- And they went and reported to the master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.
- [2 : 3 2] And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you? And in anger, his master delivered him to the jailers until he could pay all his debt.
- So also my heavenly father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. Let's turn back to Matthew chapter 6.
- And we'll read at verse 9. Jesus says to his disciples, in contrast to the pagans and to the hypocrites, the religious people, you then pray like this, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
- Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
- For, says the Lord Jesus, if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses.

[3 : 55] Amen. May God bless us his word. Well, it will help if you open your Bibles at Matthew chapter 6.

And to these very familiar words that we know as the Lord's Prayer. We've been studying this now for a week or two. And I think what we've already seen, I hope what we've seen, is that when our hearts are right, then our prayer will be right.

That's the message that the first half of the Lord's Prayer teaches to us. That when our hearts are right, we will address God personally. Because our relationship with him is real.

We really know him through the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we know him as our Father, verse 9, our Father in heaven. And because that's true, we, in our prayers, we will align ourselves with God's purposes.

It's verse 10. We'll pray that his kingdom come and that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Not our will, but his. Not my will, but thine.

[5 : 10] And we have the true kingdom perspective then that really runs all through Jesus' teaching here in Matthew chapter 6. And it's important, isn't it, not to pull the Lord's Prayer out of its context here.

It's part of this whole teaching of Jesus in this great chapter of the Sermon on the Mount. Look down to verse 33. It's such an important verse. It means, you see, if we have that right attitude, we are people who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Because we know that if we do that, then everything else that we truly need, God will indeed add to our lives. And our minds, therefore, are on treasures in heaven, not treasures on earth.

Because our beloved Master is our Father in heaven. Our Master is not the filthy lucre, the things of this world, the things that the pagans set their eyes on and long for.

But of course, we are still earthly creatures. We're still living in this world, aren't we, until the Lord Jesus comes again. So of course, we do have needs. We have need to provide for our lives.

[6 : 27] And when we pray a rite, as verses 9 and 10 would teach us to, when we are seeking first God's kingdom, then our prayer for our present earthly needs, which are all too real, then they'll be like the second half of the Lord's Prayer.

prayer. We will think about the provision for earthly needs. Of course we will. But we'll pray, as Jesus teaches us to, to acknowledge God's provision, to acknowledge that it's real, and to acknowledge that it is sufficient for all of our lives, for everything that we need.

And verses 11 and 12 speak of two aspects of God's provision for our lives, that it's right that we should acknowledge in prayer his provision of our daily food and also of our daily forgiveness.

So first, we're to acknowledge in prayer God's provision of our daily food. Verse 11, the first half, give us this day our daily bread.

Now notice the footnote there. It could be tomorrow's bread. Scholars argue about that, whether it's bread for today or bread for tomorrow. Maybe you're praying in the evening and it's tomorrow's bread. Well, let's not worry about that.

[7 : 47] Let's not fall into the trap of academics. I expect there's probably 57 PhDs on whether it's today's bread or tomorrow's bread. But I don't think it really matters, does it? You don't really need a PhD or to be a biblical scholar to work out what Jesus means us to do.

It's pretty plain. We're to ask God for daily bread, that is for food. It's a general term, isn't it? It's bread, it's food, but it's a general term, meaning our general physical needs, provision for our earthly life, the sort of things that we need as human beings to go about daily life and our daily work, our business of serving God.

And of course, Jesus expands on that in verse 25 and following, that whole section there about not being anxious. And it's clear from that that daily bread doesn't just mean literally bread or even just food, but it is what we eat, what we drink, what we wear.

It's shorthand for all the necessities of life. All the things that verse 32 says, our Heavenly Father knows perfectly well that we need and indeed provides for us.

And that's the point, you see, we're to ask for his provision, but we're to acknowledge that it is his provision. Put a you at the beginning of verse 11 and you'll get the point perfectly.

[9 : 04] You give us this day our daily bread. You see, God knows all that we need, including the physical down-to-earth things that we need. And he will provide. He will provide food and clothes and shelter and money for the gas bill, whatever it might be.

But he wants us to ask him to provide and to acknowledge that it actually is God who is providing all of these things for us. as we sometimes say in the hymn that we sing, all good gifts around us are sent from heaven above.

So thank the Lord for all his love. Now that's easy to say, but it's actually also very easy to forget to do, isn't it? To be thankful.

I take it that must be why the New Testament is full of so many commands to be thankful, isn't it? 1 Thessalonians 5, in all circumstances give thanks. Read Colossians 3 again and again.

All the way through the Bible we're told give thanks, give thanks. Why is that? Well it must be because we forget to give thanks. We forget to acknowledge all that God does give us.

[10 : 19] But you see, to ask God daily for earthly provision for our basic needs, it reminds us, doesn't it? To acknowledge with thankfulness when God does provide, it helps us to remember to be thankful people and to be contented people too, not like the pagans.

Look again at verse 32. Remember Jesus says it's the pagans who are constantly grasping after things, all these things, earthly treasures, the things that we so easily fall in love with in this world.

But no, rather we're to be people who acknowledge that our earthly needs will be met and are being met from God in His grace and in God's time and in God's chosen way, His good and perfect way.

Which may be different from our way sometimes. To bow to God in that way, to acknowledge God's provision in that way is really to bow to His primacy.

It's not to assert our own primacy. That's what it means, you see, to pray, Lord, You give us this day our daily bread. It's praying, Lord, we trust You to provide for all our needs, not all our wants, and we trust You to do it Your way, the way You think is best for us, not necessarily the way I think is best.

[11 : 49] It's the essence of sin, isn't it, to refuse to do that. That was the story of Eden, wasn't it? Go back to the beginning of the Bible, to the first two chapters of Genesis. God gives a wonderful provision, doesn't He, of daily bread in that perfect paradise.

Eat from all the trees of the garden, every single one of them, a bountiful, perfect, beautiful provision for all the daily needs of human life.

You can have it all except just one. just that one way. There's only one way for you to not have your daily bread, the anti-God way.

That's the only way I don't want you to do it. The way that sticks two fingers up at me. Why on earth would you want to do that when I've given you all of this? But of course, that's so often the very way that human beings insist on having it, isn't it?

The one way that God says you can't have that good gift. from Eden then to Europe today where just the same, we pervert so easily the gift of God's grace because we want to have it our way, not his way.

[12 : 58] Think of God's good gift of sexual relations. Another thing that is right there back in Genesis chapter 2. Great gift of God to bless the human relationship of marriage.

And what do we say to God? Sex? Yes, thank you very much. We'll have that. Plenty of it. Marriage? No thanks. We don't want that. We'll have it our way. Or else we'll turn upside down and pervert the whole concept of marriage so it's something quite different to what you invented, God.

We'll have the gift but we want it our way, thank you very much, not your way. We'll have our daily bread but we'll have it on our time in our way. It's not wrong to pray for these areas of our lives.

But we need to pray for God's gifts in God's way to come to us. Think of Israel in the wilderness and God provided them with manna, bread from heaven.

Delicious, far more delicious than ordinary bread. Tasted like wafers and honey. That's what Exodus teaches. I'll never forget when I was a boy in the Sunday school my Sunday school teacher brought in one day a beautiful bit of honeycomb and wafers and he gave us out all bits of it to show us what manna tasted like.

[14 : 13] It's amazing what you remember isn't it? Never forget that Sunday school lesson. I even remembered actually what it was about. Most illustrations all you remember is the illustration. But God provided this wonderful thing manna to teach his people to look to him to provide for them his way and to see what a wonderful way his was.

Not just bread but lovely honeycomb. In other words he was saying I want you to learn to trust me to do it my way. And what happened?

Well God said here's the way it works you can gather enough for one day and you have to trust me that it will be there tomorrow just the same. And what did they do?

Well I don't know if it will be here tomorrow this is terrific stuff let's get some extra and we'll put it in the bin for tomorrow. What do they do in the morning? They wake up and it's full of maggots and rot and God says why do you not obey me and listen to me and do it my way?

And then God said the opposite thing to them didn't he? He said now you're not to gather any on the Sabbath I don't want you going out gathering manna on the Sabbath so what you do on the day before the Sabbath is you gather twice as much and it will be fine for you tomorrow and they said don't catch us with that maggot thing we're not having those maggots no way we'll get enough for today we'll go out tomorrow morning then it'll be there and there wasn't any there.

[15 : 38] And the Lord said when will you listen to me and trust me to give you my good gifts my way how difficult can this be? And Deuteronomy 8 verse 3 God says all of this was to teach you that man doesn't live by bread alone but by everything that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

In other words it's not just bread that we need but it's God's bread God's way. and we need to acknowledge that daily and to trust him for all of our needs not just to seek after all these things our way and for ourselves but rather to submit all things to God and to his provision his way at his time and not ours.

Our food and clothing needs? Yes. Our work needs? Our desire for a life partner maybe? Yes. All these things that are part and parcel of ordinary daily human life and that concern us.

But we're to pray Lord you give it to us your way in your time you give us this day our daily bread.

That was Jesus' prayer wasn't it? In the desert in Matthew chapter 4 when Satan offered him bread and said you're very hungry aren't you? Here's some stones you're the son of God turn the stones into bread. And what did Jesus say?

[17 : 03] Yes. I'd love some bread. But man doesn't live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. He learned didn't he?

What Israel in the desert hadn't learned. That it's God's bread in God's way. So real prayer acknowledges God's provision and trusts it.

You see what balance that gives. what liberty that brings to our whole attitude of the material world to this world's bread. We're not to be ascetics as Christians.

We're not to despise bread and all the normal things the good gifts that God has given in human life. Extreme abstinence isn't some special pious thing some very spiritual thing for Christians.

Actually Paul says in 1 Timothy 4 it's demonic that kind of thinking that despises God's gifts. Now we're to receive with thanksgiving all God's good gifts.

[18 : 06] He richly provides them says Paul. He richly provides them for us to enjoy. But we're not to worship mere bread. We're not to worship these mere material things and live for these mere material things.

And some Christians do do that. It's the opposite of asceticism. Paul puts it rather starkly doesn't he to the church in Philippi their God is their belly.

He's not speaking literally although that actually can be true as well can't it? People can be addicted to food and drink and so on. But what he's saying is don't worship mere passing earthly treasure earthly bread.

Just like the manna it's only temporary. Enjoy when God gives it but it's there principally to remind you this earthly bread it's there to remind you of the heavenly bread of the living bread of the bread that promises us eternal life.

You see acknowledging God's provision of earthly bread reminds us about God's future promise in the gospel of Jesus which is the bread of everlasting life.

[19 : 22] But whoever comes to me will never hunger and whoever believes in me will never thirst. That's really why Christians give thanks at mealtimes isn't it?

That's why we call it we call it saying grace. It's not blessing the food we can't bless food how can food be blessed? It can be eaten. We're not blessing the food but what we're doing is acknowledging God's provision.

And as we acknowledge God's provision of this earthly bread it reminds us or it ought to remind us of God's glorious promise for the future. Every time we eat earthly bread every time we drink something every time we enjoy something of God's provision in this world it should remind us shouldn't it to give thanks for the heavenly bread for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for the bread of life who promises us everlasting life.

So we're to pray for provision for daily food and acknowledge that it is God's provision of God's bread in God's way.

And then the second part is that we're to acknowledge according to Jesus we're to acknowledge God's provision of daily forgiveness. Second half of verse 11 forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

[20 : 47] Now notice that this prayer has two aspects to it although they're absolutely inseparable. Jesus says we're to ask both for the experience of forgiveness forgive us our debts but also for the expression of forgiveness as we forgive our debtors.

So first notice that it is a genuine prayer for a real experience of God's forgiveness for the experience daily of the unbroken fellowship with God our Father through Jesus.

You see to ask for forgiveness is at the same time to acknowledge our need for forgiveness isn't it? And that it can only come to us from God that we can't find it anywhere else it has to come from Him it can't arise within us.

You need to forgive us our debts. But we have to ask and God has promised to provide forgiveness.

And to pray this you see is simply to express real faith in God's promise real trust real obedience to His command to ask Him that Jesus really did come to bring forgiveness from sins for those who ask Him.

[22 : 04] and Jesus wants us to ask for forgiveness. Ask and it shall be given to you. Seek and you'll find. Knock the door will be opened to you.

God loves us to ask for the things that He has promised to give to us. And that's what faith is it's asking for the things that God has promised. It's responding to God's promised word.

The whole Old Testament teaches that doesn't it? That every sacrifice that was brought to the temple to the altar according to God's word. It said to God Lord remember your covenant mercy.

Remember that you've promised to forgive us our sins on the basis of these sacrifices and God was delighted to forgive. Remember in the dedication of the temple Solomon's temple 1 Kings 8 and he promises doesn't he that whoever prayed to God towards his temple his chosen place of mercy that God would hear God would forgive.

Here in heaven he said and forgive the sins of your people because see to ask for what God has promised to those who truly seek him his way is to have faith and therefore it is to find God's forgiveness.

[23 : 21] of course to ask in that way is also at the same time to show repentance because it's to acknowledge isn't it our helplessness our need to ask God that way for forgiveness means we're coming humbly because we need it we're coming penitently we're seeking God's spirit to change our hearts to turn us away from sin to help us to walk in step with the spirit of Jesus and that's what experience of forgiveness of our sins really means and that's what's expressed you see in the second part of the petition because it is a prayer for a genuine expression of forgiveness to forgive our debtors that speaks of the penitent heart of the merciful one who Jesus says alone is the one who can actually receive God's mercy now let's be clear here we need to be clear because repentance in that sense is not a condition of forgiveness

God's forgiveness is unconditional in that sense because Paul says it was while we were enemies that we were reconciled to God not because we asked but God in his sovereign mercy reached out in an act of mercy and drew us to himself while we were still enemies but nevertheless the Bible is very clear that repentance is a necessary consequence of God's forgiveness we can't receive God's forgiveness without repenting and we can't be real recipients of the mercy of God without becoming merciful people just not possible smiling isn't a condition of happiness is it but happy people will inevitably smile when have you ever seen a happy person who never smiles impossible isn't it just as a generous person will always be a giver there's no such thing as a theoretically generous person is there some people think they're theoretically generous no no no you can't be generous without actually giving and you see that is to acknowledge

God's forgiveness of us you Lord forgive us our debts and that means that that forgiveness must flow out of us to others forgiveness is a thing that must be expressed there's no such thing as inexpressible forgiveness because God's condition is not a commodity to be received by us like a bag of something half a pound of forgiveness please no God's forgiveness is his personal transforming power that we experience that changes us turning us into people who are sons of the Father in heaven in verse 21 you see Jesus says doesn't he where your treasure is there your heart will be also and if what you truly treasure is God's mercy God's forgiveness then how can your heart not be overflowing with forgiving mercy

I mean it's as simple as that isn't it impossible for it not to be because to know God's forgiveness is to know God personally the forgiving God it's to know the joy of real reconciliation with God the Father himself and therefore to know that reconciliation with all of God's true family and you see the New Testament teaches us that the latter is evidence of the former remember Jesus' story of the elder brother didn't want to go in would not go into the party didn't want anything to do with those who are sons of the Father how could he really be a son of the Father who wanted nothing to do with the others and lack of that true reconciliation with God's family is also according to the Bible lack of evidence of true reconciliation with the Father and that's the point isn't it of that parable that we read in

Matthew chapter 18 Jesus' story of the unforgiving servant just turn around again and have a look at that that was a man wasn't he who was forgiven a vast sum by his boss by his master 10,000 talents 200,000 years of wages apparently sounds about like the UK national debts a very large sum but he wouldn't forgive a fellow servant who owed him just a few months of wages just a few months and surely the point is that his unforgiving heart his unmerciful heart showed that in fact his heart hadn't been changed at all by his experience of mercy from the master and he didn't really know his master at all you could say the master's spirit if you like was entirely absent from his life from his behavior from the way he treated others and that's why Jesus said that servant was cast away from the master's presence and very chilling words in verse 35 so it will be for you says

[29 : 04] Jesus if you don't forgive your brother from your heart he's simply saying isn't he that an attitude of unforgiveness to others is evidence really of our own unforgiveness of our own lack of a real saving relationship with God the father in our own life and that's why back in Matthew 6 here after the Lord's prayer we have these two added verses in 14 and 15 to press that point home look at yourselves carefully he's saying don't just recite this prayer because a heart attitude of unforgiveness well that's something that's characteristic not of heaven but of hell not of our father but of the devil it's true isn't it that for the people of this world revenge is sweet Walter Scott put it sweetly didn't he revenge is the tastiest morsel ever cooked in hell and we see it in the world all around us don't we when someone's been wronged desire for revenge that's why litigation lawyers will never be out of a job even if there's a big recession and divorce lawyers the same sadly friends the truth is that in our experience of forgiveness we tell the world about the

God of heaven and about his heart that he is infinitely mercy full of mercy infinitely forgiving that he loves to forgive even though it costs him immeasurably but in our expression of forgiveness we tell the world and we tell God about our own hearts and the truth about what's deep in here because the true mercy of heaven changes the human heart and a changed heart will always show visible signs things that can be seen things that can be heard things that will tell the real truth about that organ that's deep within most of you know I used to be a heart doctor I know the signs of a healthy heart and I know the signs of an unhealthy heart you could spot it when the patient walked in the door in their face in their color the way they were breathing in their neck their ankles their fingers

I'm a bit worried about a few of you actually just looking around here no I'm kidding but we used to have these things in medical exams those of you who are doctors and medical students will know spot diagnosis somebody walks in what's wrong with them and the signs on the outside tell you immediately about very damaging pathology deep within in the heart and that's what Jesus is saying you see in verses 14 and 15 it's a spot diagnosis verse 14 is a sign a cardinal sign of a healthy heart if you forgive others their trespasses your heavenly father will also forgive you this is a merciful forgiving person someone who shows mercy in Christ's name that's a true child of God it's obvious God knows him and he knows God and he loves God and his heart is possessed by the love and the mercy and the forgiveness of his heavenly father but verse 15 you see is a spot diagnosis of a hard-hearted unforgiving person and though they call themselves a

God of forgiveness but it's just not possible it's both or it's neither actually often what those people don't want is real forgiveness through reconciliation with God what they want is to get rid of a bad conscience they want to just get on with life like the disgraced boss of BP remember after the Deepwater Horizon that famous comment I just want my life back that's not repentance is it that's just remorse that's just saying I regret all the things that are happening to me so I want forgiveness but I don't really want the forgiving God who in truly forgiving me will change me and turn me into a person who treats others the way that he has treated me forgiveness from God and fellowship with God go together and that means always you see that experience of true forgiveness for us and expression of true forgiveness from us those are inseparable things in the

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