

God of All Gifts

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[0:00] We're going to turn to our Bible reading now.

And this morning we're continuing our series on what is known as the Lord's Prayer. As Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray, Willie Phillip, our senior minister, will be preaching to us. And we are going to read from the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6. But first, turn to Matthew chapter 18. And we'll read first from Matthew 18, beginning at verse 21.

We've got plenty of visitor's Bibles spread around. If you don't have one, do grab one and follow along. It's on page 823 if you're using one of those.

Matthew 18, verse 21. Then Peter came up and said to him, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him?

[1:17] As many as seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but 77 times. 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. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold with his wife and children and all that he had and payments 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 who owed him a hundred denarii. 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.

[2:37] When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place.

Then his master summoned him and said to him, you wicked servant, I forgive you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 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 should 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.

And turn back to Matthew chapter 6. And we'll read from verse 9. Page 811.

Matthew 6 verse 9. Pray then like this. Our father in heaven.

[4:14] Your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses.

Well, amen. This is God's word. Well, good morning. And do turn up with me. Matthew chapter 6. And this passage we've been studying for the last few weeks that we call the Lord's Prayer. Now, when our hearts are right, then our prayers will be right.

And that's really the message that this first half of the Lord's Prayer teaches us. When our hearts are right, then we can address God personally because our relationship with God is real.

It's not false. It's not spurious. It's not distant. We've really come to know him as God our Father. We've come to know him through Jesus Christ the Son.

[5:25] And because that is so then, we want to be aligned with his purposes. We want to be on the same track as him.

And that's why verse 10, you see, we pray that his kingdom will come, his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That is God's will, not our will.

That his will will rule our lives. In other words, you could say that these things mean that we will have a true kingdom perspective in all of our prayers.

That's the perspective, isn't it, that Jesus is focused on all the way through Matthew chapter 6 here. And as we've seen, we've said several times already that we mustn't pull the Lord's Prayer out of its context.

We mustn't treat it as though it was a sort of stand-alone prayer. No, it comes right here, doesn't it, in the midst of all of this teaching that Jesus is giving to his followers. And all the teaching in these chapters is about the priority of seeking first the kingdom of God above all earthly things.

[6:33] And that's why the Lord's Prayer, therefore, is a completely kingdom-focused prayer. If you look down to verse 25 of chapter 6, you'll see that it begins a long passage all about, well, the typical anxiety.

That's why the Lord's Prayer is going to be in the midst of the kingdom of God.

He knows what we need and knows all of our needs. So unlike those who don't know him, we who do know him can trust him. And therefore, we can live our lives wholeheartedly focused on much more important matters.

Important things now, but also, of course, things that are important for eternity. But you, verse 33, you can seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, knowing that all of these things will be added to you.

You're not like the pagans who don't know a heavenly father. So we're to live with this kingdom perspective. And we're to live knowing that if we do so, we will receive from our heavenly father all the things that we need for our earthly lives.

[8:03] That means that our minds don't have to just be on earthly things. But they can be focused on the things that really matter, the things that, in verses 19 to 24, Jesus calls treasures in heaven.

And we could do that because we know that our master is a loving father in heaven. Our master is not the filthy lucre of this world, which does so master and enslave so many people in this world.

Those who don't know the Lord, who don't understand his kingdom. Those who don't live above all things for him. But of course, Christians are still earthly creatures, aren't we?

We're still earthly creatures living in this world until the Lord Jesus comes. So we do have need for provision for our lives. Of course we do. But you see, when we pray a rite, as verses 9 and 10 teach us to, to seek first God's kingdom, then all our prayer for our present earthly needs will be like, well, the second half of the Lord's prayer here.

We will think about provision for our earthly needs. Of course we will. But we'll pray, as Jesus teaches us, to acknowledge God's provision of all of these things as real and as sufficient.

[9:32] And you see, verses 11 and 12 are speaking about that, about praying in such a way as acknowledges God's provision. We're to acknowledge his provision of our daily food.

And we're to acknowledge his provision of our daily forgiveness. So I want to think about these two things in turn. First of all, we acknowledge God's provision of daily food.

Look at verse 11. Give us this day our daily bread. Or you'll see the footnote says it could mean, give us bread for tomorrow. Scholars argue endlessly about whether it's bread for today or bread for tomorrow.

But let's not fall into the trap of academics and people writing three-year PhDs on whether this is bread for today or bread for tomorrow. Any normal person who's not afflicted with PhDs can see perfectly well what Jesus means here.

Whether it's bread for today or bread for tomorrow. It's being dependent constantly on God for our needs. We're to ask God for daily bread. That is daily food.

[10:37] But it's a general term, isn't it, that means more than that. Daily bread clearly means provision for all our physical needs. All the things that we need as human beings to live our lives in this world.

Jesus expands that, as we said, in verse 25 and following. He talks about things that we need to eat. Things that we need to drink. Things that we need to wear. So daily bread is a shorthand for all the daily normal necessities of life that we need.

And the point is that God provides these things that we need. And we're to ask for God's provision, but also to acknowledge that it is His provision for us.

If you put a you at the beginning of verse 11, that helps us, I think, to get the point. You give us this day our daily bread. You see, God knows all that we need.

He knows all our physical, down-to-earth things that we need. And He will provide for them. He'll provide food and clothes and shelter. And money for the gas bill or whatever it is.

[11:41] And that's becoming a bigger thing, isn't it? But He wants us to ask Him to provide, acknowledging that it is God who does provide these things.

We sometimes sing, not very often, what Myrta was playing for us during the offering, the hymn. All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above.

So thank the Lord. And thank the Lord for all His love. But it's easy for us to forget that, isn't it? It's easy for us to forget to be thankful.

Which I guess is why in the New Testament we are told repeatedly again and again and again to be thankful. Give thanks in all circumstances. We're told that countless times if you read through your New Testament.

And there must be a reason for that, mustn't there? Because I'm not sure we are naturally thankful. In fact, I know we're not naturally thankful. I'm certainly not naturally thankful to God.

[12:42] But you see, to ask God daily for His earthly provision for our basic needs, that reminds us, doesn't it, to acknowledge with thankfulness that He does provide these things.

And to be thankful to Him. And to be contented. Not like the pagan Gentiles that Jesus is speaking about in verse 32, who are constantly grasping after things.

All these things. It's what they live for. The earthly treasures that are so easy for us to fall in love with. But no, says Jesus, we are rather to acknowledge that all our earthly needs will be met and are met by God.

And are met, moreover, in God's good and best time. And in God's good and perfect way. See, to acknowledge God's provision for our needs like this is to buy to His primacy.

And not to our own. That's really what it means to pray, Lord, You give us this day our daily bread. It's praying, Lord, we trust You to provide for our needs.

[13:55] Not necessarily our wants. But to provide for our needs and to do it Your way. Not my way. And the essence of sin, you see, is to refuse to do that, isn't it?

Think back to the very beginning. To the story of the Garden of Eden. What does God promise human beings? Wonderful daily bread. Daily provision. Bountiful.

Perfect. All the trees of the garden. Not just bread. But an absolute abundance of much, much more. In fact, God promises them all things to receive and to enjoy with thanksgiving.

All things except just one way. There is an anti-God way to have these things. Don't go that way. I've given you all this wonderful abundance to enjoy, to receive with thanksgiving.

But of course, what is the one way that human beings want to take? The one anti-God way. And that's true, isn't it? That's been true all the way from Eden in the beginning to here in Europe in the 21st century.

[15:07] To pervert every gift of God and to want it not God's way, but our way. Think of God's gift of sexual relations.

Wonderful gift of God to bless human beings in marriage. What do we want? We say, oh, yes, thank you, Lord. We'll have that gift of sex. But marriage? No, forget that. We don't want it that way. We'll have it our way. Think of Israel in the wilderness back in Exodus 16.

You can read it later on. Remember what happened when the people were complaining to God about being hungry? What did he do? He gave them wonderful manna from heaven. Not just bread. We're told it was delightful.

It tasted like wafers and honeycomb. You can still remember when I was a little boy in junior church, my teacher teaching us about this. And he brought in loads of these beautiful wafers and a big bit of honeycomb. And we scoffed ourselves on it.

[16:05] Never forgotten. Manna, bread from heaven. God's wonderful provision, his way. But what did he do? He gave it to his people in such a way as to teach his people to look to him, to provide it.

His way, to trust God, to provide it his way. And so what did God say to the people? He said, just gather enough for one day. Trust me.

It'll be there tomorrow and you'll have your fill tomorrow also. And what did God's people do? You can't trust God that it'll be there tomorrow. Let's gather up some extra today.

Make sure that it's there tomorrow our way. Because we know how to do this better than God, don't we? And what did God do? Well, while they were asleep at night, all that extra that they gathered up and put in the fridge for the morning.

He put a whole load of worms in. And they opened up and it was full of maggots and inedible in the morning. And they complained at God. And God said, why don't you trust me?

[17:07] And then he said to them to do the opposite. And he said, well, I don't want you to have to go out and gather your food on the Sabbath day. I want you to have a wonderful rest and a lie in and a rejoicing and still have lovely food.

So it is all right the night before the Sabbath to gather extra and it'll be fine tomorrow for you. And what did the people say? Oh, you can't trust God. Look what happened last time.

All those worms. We're not doing that again. We'll just have ours today and we'll go out tomorrow morning on the Sabbath and it'll be there. And then we'll gather up. And what did they find? Well, it wasn't there.

And God said, how long will you refuse to keep my commandments? Exodus 16 verse 28. And then later on, looking back on that in Deuteronomy chapter 8 verse 3.

What did God say about all the manna in the wilderness and all of these things? He said, this was all to teach you that man does not live by bread alone, but by what? By every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

[18:09] You see, it's not just daily bread that we need. It's God's bread and God's way. And we need to acknowledge that daily and trust him for all of our needs.

Not just seek after these things like the pagans do. But rather submit in all things to God and to his promises. His way in his time.

And not our way in our time. For our food, for our clothing, for our work needs. Yes, for our desire for a partner in life and marriage balance.

For everything. But God's way. In God's time. It's not wrong to pray for these things. But we're to pray, Lord, you give us this day our daily bread.

And we trust you to do it your way. That was Jesus' prayer in the desert, wasn't it? If you turn back just a page to Matthew chapter 4. What did the devil offer him?

[19:11] Bread. His way. Here's some stones. Jesus, you're the son of God. Turn it into bread. And what did Jesus say? Well, he quoted, didn't he? Exactly those words from Deuteronomy chapter 8.

Bread, yes. But every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. God's bread. God's way. We acknowledge his provision.

And we trust him. Do you see what balance that gives? Do you see what liberty that brings to our attitude to all things in the material world?

To this world's bread. You see, the Bible teaches us we're not to be ascetics. We're not to be people who despise bread. Despise the good gifts that God gives us to enjoy in this world.

Of course not. That sort of extreme asceticism and abstinence. That's not a godly thing. That's not a pious thing. In fact, Paul says to Timothy, doesn't he? In 1 Timothy 4. It's demonic. That sort of idea is a deceitful teaching of demons.

[20:12] No, he says we're to receive with great thanksgiving God's good gifts. All the things that he richly provides with us to enjoy. But we're never to worship these things.

We're never to worship and seek after only these things. These daily bread things. These material things. As though we were to live our lives for these things. No. Some Christians do fall into that trap sometimes.

That's what Paul's speaking about when he writes to the Philippians. Their god is their belly. He doesn't mean that literally, of course. Although, of course, that can be true, can't it? People can be living enslaved to food and drink and so on.

But what he's saying is don't worship merely passing earthly treasures like manna. It's just temporary to be enjoyed.

But temporary to enjoy what God gives. But to let everything that God gives us remind us. Let this earthly bread remind us of the heavenly bread of the living bread.

[21:20] That promises us eternal life. See, acknowledging God's present provision of earthly bread should remind us always of God's future promise to us.

The gospel of the bread of life. To remind us that whoever comes to him will never hunger.

Whoever believes and trusts in him will never thirst. But will enjoy the glorious salvation that Jesus came to bring.

That's why as Christians we give thanks at mealtimes. We say grace. We're not blessing the food. You can't bless food. We're saying grace.

We're giving thanks. Grazia. Thanks to God. We're acknowledging God's gracious provision. And as we acknowledge his gracious provision in the present. It should remind us all the time of his glorious provision for the future.

Every time we thank the Lord for his earthly provision of food or whatever else it might be. It's meant to remind us to give thanks for the bread of heaven. That come down into this world to save us and to give us life eternal.

[22 : 27] Now this connection you see between God's provision in the present and God's promise for the future.

That brings us to the second part of this petition. Which is that we're to acknowledge not only God's provision of daily food. But also, even more importantly, daily forgiveness.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debts. As you can see, there are two parts, isn't there, to that petition.

They're inseparable. But we're to ask both, says Jesus, for the experience of forgiveness. Forgive us our debts.

For forgiveness. But also, do you note, for our expression of forgiveness as we forgive our debtors. So first, you see, there is a prayer, isn't there, for a genuine experience of forgiveness.

[23 : 27] For the experience daily of unbroken fellowship with God our Father through the Savior Jesus. For forgiveness. And to ask for forgiveness, again, you see, is to acknowledge, isn't it, the need that we have for forgiveness.

You don't ask for something you don't need. And to ask for forgiveness from God is an acknowledgement that we need it and that it can only come from God.

That it can't come from within us. But we're asking, you see, for the very thing that God has promised to provide. And so to pray like that is to express real faith.

It's to express real trust in God's promise. And also real obedience to God's command. Because he tells us to ask for these things. Jesus came to bring that forgiveness.

He came to save his people from their sins. And so God wants us to ask for that forgiveness that Jesus came to bring. Ask and it shall be given to you.

[24 : 31] Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. That's what Jesus goes on to say in the very next chapter. God loves us to ask for the very things that he's promised to give us.

And that's what faith is, you see. It's responding to God's promised word, isn't it? The whole of the Bible teaches us that. The whole Old Testament teaches us that. Every sacrifice that was brought according to God's word was really saying to God, Lord, remember your covenant mercy to us that you've promised.

And God delights to remember the things that he's promised. He delights to forgive. You read back in the dedication of the temple in 1 Kings chapter 8, Solomon's dedication.

And the promise that whoever prayed to God towards his temple, towards God's chosen place of mercy, whoever prayed that way, God would hear and God would forgive. Hear in heaven and forgive the sins of your people.

See, to ask for what God has promised to those who seek him, his way, is to have faith. It's to find that real forgiveness. But of course, to ask that way is also, isn't it, to show real repentance.

[25 : 52] Because it's to acknowledge your own helplessness and your own need of God's mercy. It's to come humbly. It's to come penitently. It's to seek God's spirit to be changing your heart.

To turn you away from sin so that you walk again in his steps with the spirit of Jesus. And that's what true experience of forgiveness really means. And that's what's expressed, you see, in the second part of the petition.

Because it's a genuine prayer, isn't it, for expression of that forgiveness. To forgive our debtors. Well, that speaks of a penitent heart.

It speaks of the merciful person who Jesus says is the person who alone can receive God's mercy. Now, I need to be very clear here.

Don't misunderstand. Jesus is not saying, he is not saying that repentance is a precondition of forgiveness.

[26:52] God's forgiveness is unconditional in that sense because, well, as Paul says, it's while we were enemies still that God reconciled us to himself.

It was a sovereign act of God's mercy when we were helpless. But at the same time, the Bible is equally clear that repentance is a necessary consequence.

Indeed, it's a requirement. We can't receive God's forgiveness without repenting. Just as we can't be real recipients of God's mercy without becoming merciful people.

It's one of those things that just always goes together. It's like smiling. Smiling is not a condition of happiness, is it? But a happy person will inevitably smile. You see somebody going around with a face like thunder all the time.

They can't be a happy person, can they? Or like a generous person. A generous person will be a giving person. There's no such thing as a theoretically generous person who's actually a miser in practice.

[27:58] And so you see, to acknowledge God's forgiveness of us, that you, Lord, forgive us our debts, that means that forgiveness must flow out of us to others.

Forgiveness must be expressed. Because God's forgiveness isn't a commodity that we receive.

God's forgiveness is a transforming power that we experience.

It changes us. See, in verse 21 down there, if you look, you see, Jesus says, Where your treasure is, well, there your heart will be also.

So if what you treasure above all things in life is God's mercy, God's forgiveness of you, then your heart will be full and overflowing, won't it, with that same forgiving mercy.

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be. And to know God's forgiveness means to know God personally, himself, your father. It means to know the real joy of real reconciliation with God.

[29:05] And therefore, that means that it's to know the joy of real reconciliation with all God's family, with your brothers and sisters in Christ. And the latter, you see, is evidence of the former.

Just as lack of love and joy for God's family is evidence of a lack of real love and joy towards God your father.

And that's the point, isn't it, of Jesus' parable in Matthew 18 that we read together earlier on. Turn over there with me now and have a look there because it's so important.

This man who's forgiven a vast, vast sum of money, verse 24 says, 10,000 talents, 200,000 years wages.

That is almost beginning to approach the British government's national debt. It's an utterly unpayable sum that Jesus is talking about, not the national debt.

[30:11] It is as well, but that's another matter. This man is forgiven an unimaginable sum. It is so grossly inflated as to be absurd.

And yet, he won't forgive even a fellow servant who owes him just a few pennies, just a few months' wages. Look at verse 28. That same servant who'd been forgiven this vast, vast, unpayable sum.

He went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred pennies. And seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, Pay what you owe.

So his servant fell down and pleaded with him, Have patience with me. I will pay you. It would be possible for him to pay him that amount. It would be hard, but possible, unlike his own debt. But he refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

And what is Jesus saying? He's saying that his unforgiving, unmerciful heart showed that actually he himself was a man whose heart had not been changed at all by his extraordinary experience of mercy.

[31:24] Jesus is saying to us, this man did not, in fact, really know his master at all. You could say the master's spirit was utterly lacking in any evidence at all in this man's life.

And therefore, look at verse 34. Very solemn, isn't it? He was cast away from his master's presence forever.

And so it will be for you, says Jesus, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. You see, he's simply saying that that attitude of unforgiveness to others is evidence, actually, of your own unrepentant heart.

And therefore, of your own unforgiveness. Of your own lack of a real relationship with God, your Heavenly Father.

And that's why, you see, if you turn back to Matthew 6, that's why at the end of the Lord's Prayer, we have these verses 14 and 15 added on here to draw that point home.

[32:40] Do you see? For 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.

Do you see what Jesus is saying? He's saying, look at your own heart carefully. Because an attitude of unforgiveness in your heart, that is not a characteristic of heaven.

That's a characteristic of hell. It's not a characteristic of your father. But it's a characteristic of the devil himself.

The father of lies and unforgiveness. And it's true, isn't it, that for the people of this world, revenge is often sweet.

The tastiest morsel ever cooked in hell is how Walter Scott put revenge. It's why litigation lawyers are never affected by an economic downturn, are they?

[33:52] Divorce lawyers, never going to be out of business. Because this world is full of bitter hearts. People seeking revenge, not forgiveness. And you see, what Jesus is saying is that in our experience of forgiveness, of our sins, we're telling the world about the God of heaven and his heart, his wonderfully merciful and forgiving heart.

He loves to forgive, although it cost him immeasurably. But in our expression of forgiveness, we're actually telling the world about our own hearts.

And we're telling God, aren't we, about the truth about our own hearts. Because the true mercy of heaven changes the human heart. And a changed heart will always show signs, won't they?

Signs that are visible. Signs that can be seen and heard. That tell the truth about the organ that's deep within us. Our expression of forgiveness or our expression of unforgiveness towards others tells the world and tells the Lord about the truth of what's really in here.

You know, I used to work as a heart doctor. I know the signs of a healthy physical heart. I know the signs of an unhealthy heart. And I sat in the consulting room.

[35:18] I could often know just when somebody comes in the door by looking at their face, looking at their color, listening to their breathing, looking at their neck, looking at their ankles. Some of you are medical students, some of you are doctors.

You know about the exams that you have to take, where you have to do a spot diagnosis. And heart failure is an easy spot diagnosis in an exam, isn't it? Well, that's what Jesus is talking about here in verses 14 and 15.

A spot diagnosis. Look at verse 14. It's a spot diagnosis, isn't it? Of a healthy heart. Of a merciful, forgiving person who shows mercy in Christ's name.

That's a true child of God, says Jesus. That's someone who knows and loves my heavenly father.

That's somebody who's possessed by the spirit of my heavenly father.

By my spirit. Ready to forgive. Longing to forgive. Of course, forgiveness has to be received, doesn't it? You can't forgive somebody who will not be forgiven.

[36:24] Even Jesus can't forgive someone who will not receive his forgiveness. That's the one unforgivable sin, isn't it? Refusing to be forgiven. If somebody will not repent and will not receive your forgiveness because they think they have nothing to be forgiven for, you can't forgive them.

But we're to be ready. Ready to forgive. Flowing with forgiveness. That's what verse 14 is describing. But look at verse 15, you see. It's the opposite, isn't it? It's describing the hard-hearted, unforgiving person.

Unwilling to forgive. They may call themselves a Christian. There may be the person in Matthew 7 who says, Lord, Lord. There may be the person who does wonders in the Lord's name.

But if they like verse 15, the truth is they don't know the Lord because their heart isn't changed.

That's the person that Jesus has to say, I'm sorry, I don't know you.

I don't recognize the language of your life. I don't recognize you as one of the people that the Father has given me.

[37:38] You simply can't be one of them if you're like that. And sometimes there are people, aren't there, who want the forgiveness of God, but they don't want the God of forgiveness in their life.

But that's not possible, says Jesus. It's both or it's neither. And actually often they don't really want forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

They just want to get rid of a bad conscience. And that's a very different thing. But no forgiveness from God and fellowship with God, they always go together.

And that means that experience, real experience of true forgiveness and real expression of forgiveness to others, those are always inseparable things in the kingdom of heaven. So Jesus says, you then pray like this, for daily food and for daily forgiveness. Give us this day our daily bread.

[38:49] You give us. And you forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. Well, let's pray.

Oh Lord, your present blessings we receive with glad thanksgiving to daily bread and daily mercy to forgive as we're forgiven.

Prove in us the grace of heaven. Amen.