



PRAYER

“GIVE US TODAY OUR DAILY BREAD”

Sunday 7 April 2024

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

In the Israelite national story, the daily bread of the Israelites as they wandered in the desert was the daily bread of Heaven, this provision of ‘manna’ (meaning “what is it”) – a plant or by-product of a plant as we are told is that *“it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey”* (Exodus 16:31). It would go off in a day, so it was collected daily to be consumed. The point is that daily bread was enough for the day and no more.

There is something about the way daily bread brings daily reliance on God.

When Jesus invites the Disciples to ask for daily bread, He envisages both a spiritual and a material request – ‘our daily bread’ is a **who** and a **what**. In John 6, Jesus says, *“don’t seek for food that spoils but that which endures for eternal life, which I will give you.”* They ask to “give us a sign, like the manna in the desert,” and Jesus says, *“I’m that manna that comes down from Heaven.”* He says, *“I am the bread of life. If you come to me, you will no longer hunger or thirst.”* So our spiritual daily bread is Jesus – and this prayer is, in part, a request for His presence and sustenance for the day: *“Jesus, today be my daily bread.”*

But it would be incomplete to limit this to only His presence. Moses needed the presence of God to go with them in the wilderness, but he also had a nation of hangry people who needed to eat. They had a material request, as do we, and the prayer is an invitation to ask a Good Father for daily bread, for what you need.

Which brings me to that tricky question of **what can you ask God for?** Win the lotto? Be the winning bid at an auction? St George to win the premiership... or even just a game?

We can answer this in part by differentiating between needs and wants. Needs are those things essential to human survival. Wants are nonessential desires based on preferences, trends, status, pleasure. In Aldi, everything around the outside is a need. The closer you get to the middle, the more needs become wants... All that random stuff in the middle that you didn't come for but suddenly becomes needed - like a telescope, or a voltmeter, or a saxophone - they are wants.

And how does your cultural or economic context impact needs and wants?

Did you know Australia is in the top 10 highest standard of living in the world out of 195 countries - that's the top 5%. My hunch is that the higher a nation's standard of living or the higher our personal wealth, the more our wants become needs. I *need* 4 streaming services, I *need* the latest iPhone or air pods with noise cancellation, I *need* a bigger TV, newer car, overseas holiday, best seats at that concert, I *need* my kids at that school, I *need* my clothes to have that logo. 90% of the global population may call all those things wants (not needs) or nonessential desires, but we can treat them as needs - essential to our survival! I wonder how many of our wants do we treat as essential needs? What would our bank statement tell us?

The book of Ecclesiastes is an experiment on wants and excess. The teacher says, *"I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. 11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun."*

He discovers that the satisfaction of all wants did not result in satisfaction at all - but a sense of disappointment. When I hear a story of some kind of extravagant purchase being made, I often think 3 words to myself: "and then what," because that's never going to satisfy, and then there will be a next thing... which also won't satisfy.

But the satisfaction of all wants can do worse than disappoint us; it can destroy us. A case study in this is King Solomon: Solomon starts well. In 1 Kings 3:12-13 God says, *"I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor - so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings."*

Solomon asked for wisdom, and God was delighted, so he was gifted with wisdom *and* wealth. Interesting hey! Every gift comes with a character test. How will I steward my wants and my wealth? Solomon, for all his wisdom, did not steward his wants well. It took 7 years to build the temple, but 13 years to build his own palace where he enlisted tens of thousands of slaves akin to the slavery the Israelites experienced under Pharaoh in Egypt - who,

incidentally, he made an alliance with. Solomon also had 700 wives from many foreign religions, when he should have had one, and they turned his heart away from the lord. Solomon's wants combined with his vast wealth led to his downfall.

And nothing has changed. I saw a parallel to that story of King Solomon recently reading David Hardakers new book, 'Mine is the Kingdom'. This journalist looks at American Pentecostalism and its influence in certain segments of Australian Christianity and politics. Very sobering read, and there are a bunch of things in there that I'd push back on, but it does expose the way success, power, and money can gradually normalise a culture of excess - Christian songwriters collecting multi-millions per year in royalties, preachers being given 6 figure tax-free honorariums for preaching one sermon, private jets used like Ubers, high-end designer clothing, footwear, watches, jewellery as gifts, properties called manses that weren't, ministries that were called charities that weren't, complete lack of financial accountability and stretching taxation law to its ethical limits under the guise of ministry and with a warped prosperity theology to justify it... Sounds just like ol' King Solomon. Our wants can not only become a path to discontent but a path to our downfall.

It's not, "give us today our daily excess, our daily wants..." but "daily bread". **What's a 'daily bread' need?** It's a little blurry across cultures and time, but the most basic daily bread of our lives is food in our stomachs, clothes to warm your body, a roof over your head, people to share life with, safety and justice to live freely, and perhaps the ability to work purposefully. Maslow probably got it right.

Daily bread is a request for God to provide your daily essential needs, not your wants. **It's an invitation to simplicity, contentment, and daily reliance on Jesus for life.** It's an invitation to say, "This is enough, I am content, I don't really need anything else." Let me be transparent here - I and my family live well, eat well, and, to be honest, have all our needs covered and most of our wants. My standard of living is probably much better than Solomon's. How, then, does God keep us humble and reliant on Him for our daily bread when we've pretty much got it covered?

Jesus commands us to seek first His Kingdom, worry less, to pursue generosity, to love neighbour, steward gifts and resources well, invest wisely but not for our own glory. These are all tangible ways of ensuring our wants and wealth aren't dominating our lives.

But perhaps if we don't lack, we don't learn? Perhaps sometimes God has to lead us into experiences of lack to remind us of our limitation, His abundance, and to rely on Him - whether God orchestrates it or it's a consequence of people - perhaps even lack can be His gift. Sometimes, it's the absence that makes you realise what matters, more than the presence? If you've lost a spouse, you may know that the presence of that person feels more precious when they are no longer here. Perhaps you've been out of work, or work is slow, or you're injured or sick or unable to work, or you're a contractor or a casual or are

made redundant... These things breed reliance and moderate our definitions of needs and wants. There is a gift in that if we will learn it.

Personal illustration: For the past few years, many of you will know that I've had two employers, you - our church - employ me 2.5 days a week and another Christian organisation based in Melbourne 3 days per week for which I have been running a national initiative with 17 churches and about 5,000 people across the country to work on how they are helping people integrate their faith with their working lives. I love all the work I do and feel called to it. But in the last month, I and all 10 of my colleagues in the Melbourne organisation were made redundant for a bunch of strategic and financial reasons that have nothing to do with the work I was doing but directly impacted their capacity to continue to fund it. So I lost my job! For now, I'm committed to finishing the project I started and will keep doing the work voluntarily. This is partly because of the impact it is having and partly because my Doctoral Thesis is directly tied to the pilot. Not being paid two-thirds of my total income is, of course, a bummer; but the opportunity God is giving me is to juggle a few less balls, focus on what I've been called to steward, and not worry about having all my financial bases covered - to trust and know that all I need to do is seek the Father, His Kingdom and trust in His provision for what we need, but also be prepared to hold loosely to what we want. Philippians 4.19 says, "*And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*" Awesome, but how does God move this truth from just being true to being your experience? By the gift of lack.

All of life is God's unique curriculum for your formation. Opportunities for confronting our idols, sacred cows and blind spots. I think our wants and excesses have to come under His Lordship. We must think biblically and ethically about what we think we need and want. We must genuinely reflect on what are all our wants doing to us, doing to others or our planet:

- Shelter is a need - but what are the ethics of multiple home ownership in a nation where property prices are increasing at a rate of 7 times wages, where rental properties are almost non-existent, where 98% of all rentals are beyond the financial capacity of those on a pension, and where young people have to work for 10 years just to save a deposit on a loan they will never be able to service without needing to become workaholics...
- Food is a need - but what about the ethics of always wanting my smashed avo on toast or strawberry smoothie all year round, even when it's out of season and has to be flown in from the other side of the world...
- Clothing is a need - but what about the ethics of fast fashion when my clothing may be cheap, but someone got paid next to nothing to make it for us...

How often do we forego our wants being met so that other people can have their needs met? Do we invest more into our entertainment, our dining out and communications on a weekly basis than we do into the work of the Kingdom? How do you really feel about our

church being almost 18% down on budget again this year? Does it concern us that our church is financially in decline?

These are uncomfortable questions, but they are honest questions too that reveal, as Jesus said, where our treasure and our hearts really are.

“Give us our daily bread” is not about your wants or your kingdom, but simply about your needs and His Kingdom. It’s an invitation to want less from God and to desire more for others. It’s an invitation to flee from our obsession with wanting the next thing and rely on God for what we truly need – individually and together as a community: The bread of His presence, the bread of our daily physical and communal needs.

So where to from here?

Examine:

- How focused are you in prayer on your wants? What wants have become needs? And should they be re-evaluated?
- The **who** of daily bread – Jesus, our living bread, our true nourishment, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being.”
- The **what** of daily bread – Daily needs, not wants; an invitation to simple contentment, to the ‘enough’ of today.
- The **supply** of daily bread – Who are you to be part of God’s daily bread for? What does someone need as a basic necessity of life that you supply?