

Luke 11:3-4
A Pattern for Prayer, Man's Need

We have discussed the Old Testament context of prayer and the fact that true prayer, as Jesus informs us, is always centered on the glory of God and the fulfillment of His will. As we look at the second half of the prayer given by Jesus in Luke 11, we see that though the focus changes to man's need, it is still in the context of bringing glory to God. There is no sense in which the idea of a *quid pro quo* with God occurs. That is, we are not to give God praise and glory so that He will then bless us with what we want. Rather, the sequence of the two sections of the prayer remind us that God must come first. (Matthew 6:33). God's person and plan must be our first priority. Only under that condition, can our requests for provision, pardon, and protection be considered sensible.

In fact, the very fact that we must go before God to have our needs met indicates that His power is required. His glory in meeting our needs is the point of the prayer. Not that we get what we want, but that He, as a perfect Heavenly Father, provides graciously for His children according to his perfect will. His compassion, mercy and generosity are on display. Even in the section in which we make requests, the prayer is all about Him.

God Sustains

Man's needs are both physical and spiritual. And they are constant. They are continual. We are to pray without ceasing for these things. Jesus said that we are to ask (the word means to "keep asking") God to "give us each day our daily bread" (v. 3). The request is not to be taken literally; there is no command to vegetarianism here. Instead, the meaning is that we are to ask God to give us whatever we require for sustaining our daily lives. This would include food and shelter, but also health, possessions, and even peace and order in society.

Yet, this is not a call to luxury and ease. We are to ask for bread, not steak and lobster. We are to ask for shelter, not a mansion. The purpose is not to make our lives convenient, but to equip us with the necessary things to sustain us that we might be useful to praise our God and further His kingdom. As Agur prayed,

“⁷Two things I asked of You,
Do not refuse me before I die:
⁸Keep deception and lies far from me,
Give me neither poverty nor riches;
Feed me with the food that is my portion,
⁹That I not be full and deny You and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’
Or that I not be in want and steal,
And profane the name of my God” (Proverbs 30:7-9).

It is astonishing that the Creator and Sustainer of the universe cares about your personal needs. Not only is He the God of history, but also the God of our breakfast. He is in control of earthquakes and floods, and of our cars and houses. He is the God of all things.

Therefore, it is sinful for believers to worry about such things. Not that we should not care; we are not called to apathy, but to trust. We are to “be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6). Believers should be in the habit of “casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). Matthew 6:25-33 reminds us that God cares about the birds and the flowers; He sustains even them. How much so His own children! If He cares for sparrows, He will care for us. To do otherwise than to trust God is to call into question His love, omnipotence, and sovereignty.

Yet reality gives us pause here. There are certain promises in Scripture that, on the surface seem unkept.

David wrote, “¹⁸The Lord knows the days of the blameless,
And their inheritance will be forever.
¹⁹They will not be ashamed in the time of evil,
And in the days of famine they will have abundance. . . .
²⁵I have been young and now I am old,
Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken
Or his descendants begging bread” (Psalm 37:18-19, 25).

And again, “¹⁸Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him,
On those who hope for His lovingkindness,
¹⁹To deliver their soul from death
And to keep them alive in famine” (Psalm 33:18-19).

Solomon wrote, “The Lord will not allow the righteous to hunger,
But He will reject the craving of the wicked.” (Proverbs 10:3).

What are we to make of this? Surely godly people in Israel starved during famine. Surely godly people do so today. Is God unfaithful? Is He unable? Is He unwilling? How did the disciples understand this prayer in the context of the history of Israel they knew so well?

Three things ought to be mentioned in response. First, we must remember that God insisted that “My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways” (Isaiah 55:8). God’s purposes and glory supercede man’s interest. Second, the fact that man does not make good use of what God has supplied does not implicate God in the lack of resources. God has given man plenty on this earth. There is enough food for all. There is enough material for everyone to have shelter. That man’s greed has led to an uneven distribution of the resources of the planet is not God’s fault. Third, and not unrelated, God’s promise does not preclude man’s efforts. Any more than God’s sovereignty in calling people to Himself does not excuse man from evangelism, neither does God’s promise of provision mean that people need not work.

“¹⁰For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. ¹¹For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. ¹²Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12).

God Saves

As important as our physical needs seem to us, they are nothing compared with our spiritual needs. Even if all of our physical needs were met in the highest degree, if we die in our sins we are lost forever. Earthly splendor is no compensation for eternal damnation. That is why Jesus told us to ask God to “forgive us our sins” (v. 4).

Implied in the request is the acknowledgement that we all need forgiveness. It is one of the most common truths of Scripture “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The disciples knew this. In his prayer dedicating the temple, Solomon acknowledged its purpose saying “there is no man who does not sin” (1 Kings 8:46). He echoed this sentiment later, “there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins” (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

Man’s sin had removed him from the favor of God, “your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.” (Isaiah 59:2). Sin has caused every ill thing that has happened to mankind. It is the primary cause of every evil thing from national crises to environmental catastrophes to broken relationships. It has made man spiritually dead, under the condemnation of God, and without any hope for salvation. “²And you were dead in your trespasses and sins . . . ³indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath . . . ¹²having no hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:2, 3, 12). What a wretched state!

Moreover, God cannot ignore sin; that would be against His nature. “I will not acquit the guilty” God warned Moses (Exodus 23:7). God’s justice was ever present in the Old Testament. The disciples knew without a doubt the truth that “the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished” (Nahum 1:3). The disciples also knew that they could not save themselves. The sin and guilt offerings in the temple were only temporary measures to assuage God’s wrath. They were not permanent solutions. This was a truth carried over to the New Testament. Everyone knew that “there is none righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:10, quoting Psalm 14) and all knew as well that the only cure for sin was forgiveness and that God alone could forgive sins, “who can forgive sins, but God alone” (Luke 5:21).

There are many words for sin in the New Testament. The word used here, *hamartia*, is the most frequent and means to miss the mark. That is, a sin is anything that falls short of God's perfect standard of holiness, “therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

A second word is *parabasis*, which means to overstep or cross over. This word sees sin as going outside the bounds of God’s law, “for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation” (Romans 4:15). A third word, *anomia*, is usually translated as ‘lawlessness’ and sees sin as the act of human selfishness and pride, as in 1 John 3:4, “everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.” Another word, *opheilema*, is used to describe sin as a debt. It is the term Matthew used in relating this same part of the prayer, “and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12).

All of these words have the same basic meaning. Man has not met the standard set by a holy God. Man has sinned and needs forgiveness. Man is sinful, fallen, and continually guilty of wrongdoing. Furthermore, we have no power to deliver ourselves from sin. It is within us. Our pride excuses sin. It explains it away. It justifies it. Believers must, like Peter, cry out “go away from me Lord, for I am a

sinful man!” (Luke 5:8). Jesus, no doubt, reminded the disciples of the heart-felt emotion of David when he wrote in Psalm 51:17, “the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”

Only God can provide forgiveness. He alone has the authority to remove the guilt of our sin and not hold it against us. That was the purpose of the atonement. That was why Christ had come. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

The forgiveness spoken of by Jesus in this prayer has two facets. First, it is the judicial forgiveness each believer receives at salvation. This is the great doctrine of substitutionary atonement spoken of in 2 Corinthians 5:21, when God the Father “made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” In this, Jesus “Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24).

This was the act prophesied by Isaiah,

“All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him” (Isaiah 53:6).

foretold by Jesus, “²⁷and when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, ‘drink from it, all of you; ²⁸for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins’” (Matthew 26:27-28).

and summarized perfectly in the God-inspired letter of Paul, “¹³When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, ¹⁴having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Colossians 2:13-14).

This act of atonement is complete, irreversible, and permanent. It applied to the Old Testament saints and Christ’s disciples as well as it does to us today. Though, perhaps, they did not fully understand all the nuances and implications of the atonement, the disciples had been taught the benefits of forgiveness.

“How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered!” (Psalm 32:1)

“³If You, Lord, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?
⁴But there is forgiveness with You,
That You may be feared” (Psalm 130:3-4).

The second facet of forgiveness is relational forgiveness. This is why the disciples (and us) were taught to pray for forgiveness even though they had already been forgiven. The disciples understood their dilemma. God “can not look on wickedness with favor” (Habakkuk 1:13). Yet they knew they sinned regularly. The system of sacrifices was designed to temporarily bridge the gap, but it was insufficient to fully pay the penalty for sin. Regular confession of sin was required to function within the body of Christ and to enable the disciples to further the kingdom of God. This was why Jesus added “for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (v. 4). Refusal to forgive is, itself, a sin. It is simply an oxymoron to be an unforgiving Christian. Our relational forgiveness with God cannot be understood apart from our willingness to forgive others.

Jesus elaborated on this idea in Matthew’s account, “¹⁴For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions” (Matthew 6:14-15). This is not a reference to judicial forgiveness. That is, Jesus is not saying that we lose our salvation if we do not forgive others. Rather, He is saying that in order to appropriate the relational forgiveness offered by God through Jesus Christ, we must be humble and willing to forgive those who have offended us.

There are many reason why forgiveness should be the habit of a believer. First, forgiveness is one way we can best emulate God. What is more godly than forgiving? “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).

Second, we ought to forgive because any offense against us is an offense against God all the more,
“Against You, You only, I have sinned
And done what is evil in Your sight” (Psalm 51:4).

Third, since we have been forgiven so much by an infinite and perfectly holy God, surely we ought to forgive others who are just like ourselves. The Pharisees had misinterpreted some Old Testament passages to teach their followers that forgiveness should be extended only three times. After that, one was free to judge.

“Thus says the Lord,
‘For three transgressions of Damascus and for four
I will not revoke its punishment,
Because they threshed Gilead with implements of sharp iron’” (Amos 1:3).

Jesus insisted that was not the case. “²¹Then Peter came and said to Him, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ ²²Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven’” (Matthew 18:21-22).

Fourth, refusing to forgive makes a person unable to truly worship. “²³Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering” (Matthew 5:23-24).

Fifth, refusing to forgive takes the authority of God onto oneself. It is God alone who has the right of vindication. “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:18).

Finally, refusing to forgive robs the believer of the opportunity to grow through trials. Being offended can be profitable if believers cooperate with God's grace and use the opportunity to grow in their faith. Believers should be “well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake” (2 Corinthians 12:10).

God Secures

Jesus concluded His example of prayer “and lead us not into temptation” (v. 4). This is curious in light of the fact that God “Himself does not tempt anyone” (James 1:13). Why then this petition in the prayer? It seems unnecessary. If God does not tempt anyone, then why as Him not to tempt us?

Much like praying for forgiveness, this part of the prayer is for the believer. We need to be reminded that we are weak and need God’s grace to resist sin. We live in a foreign land, and we are unable to navigate it without error. Ours is a world where unbiblical ideas are put forward with regularity, “wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic” (James 3:15). This makes men blind, “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:4) and leads them to sin. Our need for protection is daily; we are ever ready to fall.

Another element of this petition involves the fact that, while God does not tempt, He does allow trials to impact the believer. The idea here is that the believer is requesting that grace be given to appropriate the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13, “no temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.” We all know how sin works. “¹⁴Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death” (James 1:14-15).

The great prayers of the New Testament are prayers for the spiritual protection of the saints so they might be able to grow in their faith and further the kingdom of God.

“¹⁵Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of your time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16).

“¹¹To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, ¹²so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12).

“¹¹But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. ¹²Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:11-12).

“⁹And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ” (Philippians 1:9-10).

“⁹For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:9-10).

Take Aways

As we recognize our need, may we pray to God for His grace to meet them, so we might be better able to serve Him in the furthering of His kingdom.