

Gifts and Debts with God and People

Thomas Robinson, *On Earth as in Heaven*, 3, September 2, 2012

Matthew 6:7-15

⁷ And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, **for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.**

⁹ Pray then like this:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
¹⁰ **your kingdom come, your will be done,**
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ **Give us today our daily bread.**

¹² **And forgive us our debts,**
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ **And lead us not into temptation / testing,**
but deliver us from evil.”

¹⁴ For if you forgive people their offenses, **your heavenly Father will also forgive you.**

¹⁵ But if you do not forgive people, neither will your Father forgive your offenses.”

Matthew 6:31-33

³¹ “Therefore **do not be anxious**, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and **your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.** ³³ **But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.**”

Exodus 16:4 God promises Manna for the people of Israel

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain **bread from heaven** for you, and the people shall go out and gather **a day’s portion every day.**”

Matthew 4:3-4 In the wilderness, Jesus is confronted by Satan after his baptism.

³ And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴ But he answered, “It is written, **‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’**” [Deut. 8:3]

John 6:32-35 After feeding the 5000 with bread, Jesus speaks of the Bread of Life.

³² Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you **the bread from heaven**, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴ They said to him, “Lord, give us this bread always.” ³⁵ Jesus said to them, “**I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.**”

Deuteronomy 15:1-2 God commands Israel to forgive debts every seven years.

¹ “At the end of every seven years **you shall grant a release** (forgiveness). ² And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall **release** (forgive) **the debt** owed by his neighbor. He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because **the LORD’s release** (forgiveness) **has been proclaimed.**”

Matthew 18:21-22

²¹ Then Peter said to him, “Lord, how often will **my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?** As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but **seventy times seven.**”

Luke 23:33-34

³³ And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him ... ³⁴ And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Jesus' Prayer Shapes Everyday Life

In his teaching prayer, Jesus turns to the web of needs and relationships that shape everyday life. The whole prayer is about daily life: The first half helps us see that our lives are part of a great reality we often push from consciousness. *Father, name, kingdom, God's will, earth and heaven:* all point to God interacting with his world and his people. They link the disciple to the great story from the past and orient us in the present toward an unfolding future filled with God's completed purpose for his creation. We affirm who we are in God. Jesus now turns to basic needs and pains of our life that often are the main point of our prayers. We need something and want God to help. We're hurting and want relief. We've messed up and want to be told it's ok. Jesus stresses that these needs are important to us and God. In such everyday experiences God meets us.

Asking for the Gift of Everyday Bread

Give us today our daily bread. Actually, from what Jesus has said, one might think he would skip such a request. God knows what we need. Don't worry about food and clothing. No need to ask. Stay focused on the spiritual. But Jesus shows bread is a central battleground of life. Where do I get bread? I earn money and buy it. Bread is nice, especially with steak and a house to eat it in and car in the garage. . . . I really need more money! Money says, "I'm the god who really provides, the master you can depend on. Serve me!" Jesus says that it's important for us to know that even the bare morsel of bread is a gift from God, no one else. Pray for the gift. God needs no information, but we need to train ourselves to see and know that every basic of life is God's gift. God is generous and loves to give. *Ask, seek, knock!* Ask for the best that you know. Let God choose. But bread is more. Throughout the story of God's people, "bread" stands for all that nourishes life. Manna in the Exodus wilderness, one day's portion at a time. Jesus' temptation: turn stones into bread. Jesus refers back to the lesson of the wilderness. Jesus feeds 5000 with five simple loaves of bread and when the crowds pursue him, he shows himself as the "bread of life." What is the real hunger and thirst of human life? Here Jesus creates a new word to modify bread: *epiousios*, meaning *for today, daily, for tomorrow, for the future, necessary for life*. Several possibilities to reflect on. What really is my "daily bread" nourishing my life? What is my "bread of life?" At the last supper Jesus broke bread and gave it to us: "This is my body. . . ." (Mt 26:26) To the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus broke bread and their eyes were opened and they recognized him. (Lk 24:28-35) Bread is God's gift: the concrete everyday loaf; the bread of life in Jesus.

Debts and Sins and the Freedom of Forgiveness

And forgive us our debts. We just know it should say "trespasses." Why does Jesus say debts? Jesus is not excluding trespasses/sins/transgressions/offenses. He mentions them explicitly in words after the prayer. But Jesus wants his disciples to think in a larger framework, shaped by God's ancient instruction to Israel to practice a Sabbath year forgiveness of debts and a Jubilee year of renewal. Debts, wrongs, losses accumulate in human life. Every so often there was a need for starting over, a deep renewal, a Jubilee. Forgiveness & renewal for God's people became a sign of God's coming as king for his people. (Isa 40:1-5) What debts? What do we owe God? Isn't the answer 'everything'? We are stewards of every aspect of life. Our trespasses and sins add another dark, destructive, alienating layer to that heap of indebtedness. When we owe a debt we can't pay we avoid the person we owe. We become alienated from God. When we ask God to forgive our debts, we ask him to absorb the cost of the debt, to take it on himself. That is exactly what God has done in Jesus. In Mt 18, after telling Peter to forgive, Jesus tells about a king who out of mercy forgave his servant a gigantic debt (billions of dollars.) Jesus was on his way to that forgiveness. But! Jesus teaches us to ask for the forgiveness we already give to others. Jesus is always aiming at the transformation of our hearts and lives. We need the freedom, renewal that comes by forgiving; God doesn't. Every wrong someone does to me is an infringement on my life, my possessions, feelings, rights, honor, etc. It's a debt. It's hard to let go. It's hard to absorb the cost. They ought to pay. Real forgiveness is recognizing the wrong, and absorbing the cost. Letting it go. Just as God takes the cost of my sins and life on himself. Alienation ends. Freedom breaks out with God, with others. Renewal, deliverance – Jubilee!