

THE BON AIR PULPIT

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Scripture: *Matthew 6: 9-13*

Sermon: *What Pitfalls Do I Need To Avoid?*

When Jesus taught us to pray, He said I want you to begin with your focus on God. You are to pray: “Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” He said I want you to talk about the thy’s before you talk about the my’s. You begin to focus on Him and what He is concerned about and what His interests are.

Many times, some of you have taken a telescope and looked through the small end and focused the big end toward the heavens. You have seen so many things that you never saw before. Sometimes people have taken telescopes and turned them around and focused all of the attention on themselves. Jesus said if you are ever going to learn how to pray, you have to first think of Me and then start thinking about yourself. At the end of the Lord’s prayer, Jesus said what I would like for you to do now is to focus on those areas of your life that need to be bathed with the help of God.

I want to ask you a question. If you were a teacher and your student came to you and said “we want you to tell us the three most important things that you want us to know.” What would you include on the list? What would you include in a prayer? If you were getting ready to give a model prayer for people and had to include three things that would be the most important areas of their life, what would you

include? Maybe some of you are surprised at what Jesus included. He included your need for today: give me my bread, day by day. He talked about your past: forgive me when I have done wrong to others and when others have done wrong to me. He talked about your future: give me guidance day by day. And, deliver me from the evil one. When Jesus taught you to pray, He began to talk about your relationship to material things, your relationship to other people, and your understanding that you live in a broken and evil world.

Notice the first petition. Jesus said, you are to pray give me day by day my bread. Everyone who has ever studied that passage of scripture understands that it comes out of a story in the Old Testament. The children of Israel were going out of Egypt up to their promise land. Between the two countries is the huge Sinai Peninsula which is a desert. They had not been there very long when the people began to panic. “How are we going to eat?” God said, “listen to me. I want you to go out in the morning and you will see my provision for you.” They went out the next morning and saw a wafer lying on the ground. They looked at it and said what is it? God said: “it is manna. This is what the word manna means.” He said, “these are the rules. Every day that you are in the desert, I will provide for you with the bread from heaven. Here are the rules. You are to get bread every day. If you get bread for more than one day at a time, it is going to spoil. You can’t do your weekly shopping. Every day you have to go out and get it. The only exception to the rule is that on Friday. You can get enough for Saturday because on the Lord’s day I don’t want you to do any work. Every day the people would go out and every day they would get the bread. That was how they survived for forty years. What I have just quoted for you is Exodus chapter 17.

In the book of Deuteronomy chapter 8, there is a commentary on what God is doing. Listen to what He said. God said “I lead you in the way of the desert for forty years to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart. I gave you bread every day to teach you that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God.” Listen to the reason God gave them manna every day. He said, “I wanted you to know that everything you have is a gift. I wanted to teach you to depend upon Me. I wanted you to look beyond the bread. I wanted you to look up to Me and be aware that all that you have comes from Me.”

Jesus tried to help us understand that in chapter six of the book of Matthew. He said “don’t you know that some people worry about whether you will have enough to eat or drink or clothes to wear?” He said, “God will take care of you.” Then He said “what I want you to know is that you can live life with a sense that God will meet the needs of your life.” I could take a survey this morning and find all kinds of economic concerns in this room. Some of you are wondering whether you are going to have enough money to go to college. Some of you are worried about how you are going to take care of young children or whether you are going to have a job next month. Some of you wonder whether you are going to be able to take care of your aging parents or if you are going to have enough money to retire. There are all kinds of lists. Listen to the Lord’s prayer. Lord, you will give me day by day my bread. The emphasis is not on bread. The emphasis is on day by day. Day by day I have the assurance that whatever my needs are, you will provide for me. Read on in that sixth chapter and read verse thirty-three. There is a basic law of the kingdom that everyone in this room needs to understand. Listen to Jesus. “But if you seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, then all of these things will be added to you.” Now listen to what we are to do and listen to what God does.

My job in life is to keep my priorities straight. I am to put God and His kingdom and His righteousness first. This simply means that whatever He says is right. I put that first. If I do that, then God provides for my material needs. You see what a difference to be able to wake up every day and say everything is dependent upon me. Everything is dependent upon my circumstances, upon my ability, upon what I can do. I can wake up every day and say Lord, it is from you. A wonderful, releasing experience happens in your life when you begin to write over your life. Everything is a gift. God will provide for your life.

I need to remind you that God said to pray “give me day by day my bread and not day by day my cake.” God will meet some of your needs. He will never promise to meet all of your wishes. A pastor’s wife was teaching English as a second language to some internationals. She used the word eccentric. One of the ladies raised her hand and said “I don’t know what eccentric means.” The teacher said, “let me give you an illustration.” She said “we have a very sick man in our society who is called the Unabomber. He would send bombs through the mail and they would kill and maim people. Finally, he was found in Montana. He lived up in the mountains by himself in a one-room house without electricity or running water. That is what it means to be eccentric.” The student raised her hand again and said “you mean eccentric is if you live in a one room house without electricity or running water.” The teacher said “yes, that is it.” The student said “teacher, seventy percent of the people in my country live that way.”

Please understand that when you come to God and have this long wish list that has been prompted to you by Madison Avenue, God

hasn't promised to give you everything you want. He is concerned about is the person who is wondering about whether they are going to have daily bread. **We have missionary family parents in our church today. Their daughter is in Ethiopia trying to help people get bread.** My son in law and daughter are in Mozambique, which is now considered the poorest country in the world. They are trying to help people get bread. When I pray I say, "Lord, I know you will meet my needs. Please help me to not to bring a long wish list and somehow obligate you to try to do it." I do not know why God gives some of us cake and other people not enough bread. But I do know that every time God selected people and blessed them, He thought that they would take their blessing and share it with somebody else. In the middle of a world that is so hungry, we live in the midst of cornucopia of plenty. Surely He would say "I could give it to Americans because Americans will then share it with the world." I remind you that it is never give me my bread. It is give us our bread. For the person that these missionaries are trying to minister to, maybe God's answer is that if God gives bread to me, and I understand that everything I have is a gift, then maybe I will share it with somebody who does not have bread.

Notice the second petition. I want you to pray for your own forgiveness and pray for forgiveness of others. Part of the request starts off with just a spirit of humility before God. I say, "dear God I have a debt. It is a debt I can't pay. If I could pay, I wouldn't be praying this way. Lord forgive me my debt. What I need is mercy from you." I don't know whether you have ever gotten by your bed at night and said "Lord, I am not capable of living like I ought to live. I want to bow before you and I pray you

will forgive me. Forgive me for that which I can not do myself.

I tell you I want to live with other people's mercy. I want mercy in my marriage. When I wake up in the morning I have the cow staggers. I stagger to the breakfast table and my wife and I have an agreement that we don't discuss much at the breakfast table. I just know she is there beyond the Cheerio box and that is about it. The other day, after I had eaten, I went back and got ready to come to work. I looked in the mirror. My mind tells me I am forty-five, my body says I am about **twenty** years old. Everything on top is either turning gray or coming loose. I have things sagging I didn't even know I owned. I hadn't shaved and I looked and said, "Lord, give Judy lots of mercy." I want mercy as your pastor. Everyday when I go home, whether I have been here twelve or fourteen hours, it makes no difference. There is a list of people I didn't contact and a list of about fifteen things I didn't do. All I can depend upon is to say to you, "give me mercy."

I met a man the other day that said "I just want everybody to treat me for what I deserve." I said, "Lord, help him." Jesus said there is a big word that goes with gift. That big word is grace. I need grace. I need lots of grace. I need amazing grace. I need to come before God and say "dear God only by your grace can I be accepted in your sight." Listen to what happens. Whenever I begin to operate on grace towards God and me, then I have to operate on grace between you and me. I can't come to God and say "God, I am unworthy" and then operate with you that you have to be worthy to get along with me. Jesus said it this way. This is for all the kingdom. If you are forgiven by your heavenly Father, then you will forgive others. But if you don't forgive others, God can't forgive you. Now why is that so? Let me show you. Can you imagine getting down on your knees and saying "O God forgive me. I am unworthy. I have debts I

can't pay? Only your grace will help me. Then I get up and go to my wife and say you are not worthy. No, you see if I ever get a good dose of humility and a good dose of brokenness, then I begin to operate with other people in that sort of way. Jesus said wake up every day, every day, and pray for grace for yourself and grace for others.

Somehow you may be able to live in harmony and peace. I have spent a lifetime trying to help people get along with each other. What I have found when dealing with two people who have been trying to get along, is I never can make any progress until both of them admit they have problems with themselves. I have set in a room where one person has told me everything that is wrong with the other person. The other person has then told me every thing that is wrong with this person. You can get into the relationship and spend weeks. You see, I know of a lot of things that are wrong with you. I don't know many things that are wrong with me. Until I get to the point where I deal with my problems and ask for mercy and grace from you, then I will never be able to build a relationship with you.

Notice the third petition. You live in a broken and an evil world. Prowling this earth is the evil one. What you need to pray for every day is "O God, I am weak. You know I am weak. Don't lead me beyond what I can handle. Lord, I need your protection from the evil one." Samuel Rutherford, a great author, said he woke up one night and heard someone in his house. He came down the steps and he went into the living room. In his favorite chair, he saw someone sitting there. He went over to him and when he turned around, he realized it was the devil. Samuel Rutherford said, "oh, it is only you." Most of us think that devils are things that we use to scare little kids. We cannot imagine that there is a systematic, essential part of this universe that is so laden with evil that it can entrap you at any moment. Most of us think we can handle

ourselves. We never think that somehow or other we could be misguided. We never think somehow or other we could get in over our heads. We never thought we would do that. What we never see is that everyday we fail. We fall short of what God did because we feel we can handle ourselves.

I was talking with a man recently. I was encouraging him to get involved in some Christian fellowship somewhere in church and he turned to me with all the manly gusto he had. He said, "I can handle myself." Have you ever recognized that you live in a culture that has enough hidden dangers in it that it could destroy you at any moment? The evil one knows your weaknesses and will point the fiery missiles right at them. To try and go through life with your own self-sufficiency and say I can take care of myself, God help you. He said "pray, pray to be guarded." Hear the prayer. "Dear God, I have trouble with material things, so God help me to live on your gift. God I have trouble with myself and getting along with people and people getting along with me. Help me to live on grace. Lord, I live in a broken world, with all kinds of temptations and I can do things I never thought I would do. O God, guard me."

Once you ever learn to pray that kind of prayer and understand those principles, then you will begin to understand how Jesus taught you to pray. There are people in this room today in which God has been working in their life. We believe in a God who does personal work on individual people. The reason you are here today is not because you just woke up this morning and decided to come. God has been working in your life. God is leading you to take a step toward Him and make decisions for Him.

