

TODAY IS ALL THAT YOU HAVE!

Today's Text: Lk 11: 1- 13 [Cf.: Mat. 6: 8-34]

Extracts:

Now it came to pass as [Jesus] was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, “*Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.*” So He said to them, “*When you pray, say: ..*”*Give us day by day our daily bread*” [Lk 11: 1-2, 3]

“**In this manner, therefore, pray: ... Give us this day our daily bread...Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble**” [Matt. 6: 9, 11, 34]

In December 2009, Mrs. Jennifer Cline of Monroe, Michigan State, wrote a letter to President Obama in which she described how she had lost her job as a pharmacy technician.¹ She said, “I lost my job, my health insurance and my self-worth in a matter of days,” and added that she remained inspired by the President and his family. On January 8, 2010, an aide flagged the letter to the President who replied her on a White House-headed card, thanking her for her inspiring words and assuring her, “Things will keep getting better.” He signed and mailed it to her. A hand-written note from the US President is a collector’s item that recipients would like to keep. However, Jennifer and her family needed to survive today. So, she put the note out for sale and an autograph dealer bought it from her for \$7,000! Jennifer’s husband, Jason, later told local media, “This will get us through the winter.”

In this week’s Bible text, Jesus has said that when we pray, we should ask His Father to give us our daily bread because today has enough of its own trouble. So, why then do we worry so much about the future that we cannot control or continue to be haunted by the past which we cannot change? How can we effectively use today, the only time within our control, to achieve our life-time goals? Those and more are the issues that we shall consider in this week’s interesting study.

¹ Based on the following sources: “Struggling woman has to sell Obama letter to help pay for house,” http://www.nypost.com/p/pagesix/jennifer_cline_things_better_handwritten_DHxGcCyMoU9kVZ6XQIpyNJ ; Oct. 31, 2010; and “Hard-up US couple sells letter from Obama for \$7,000,” <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-11676403> ; 2 Nov. 2010

1. Background: The Lord's Prayer is real!

The Lord's Prayer is used in virtually every Christian denomination. However, there is a debate in some quarters whether it is a prayer to be said or a pattern after which we should craft our own prayers. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His listeners, "In this *manner*, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven ..." [Matt. 6: 9-13]. That suggests that it is a prayer model that we can copy. Paul has written that we should be anxious for nothing "but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving," we should make our requests known to God [Phil. 4: 6]. That appears inspired by the Lord's Prayer. However, in this week's Bible text, the context was different. After Jesus had ceased praying, one of His disciples requested that He should teach them to pray as John the Baptist had taught his disciples. Jesus replied, "*When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven...*" [Lk 11: 1-2]. That suggests that He meant it also as a prayer.

That point is underlined by the testimony of a Pakistani Muslim woman that Jesus Himself called to be His follower.² Gulshan Fatima (1951-) was the youngest daughter (out of five children) of a wealthy and famous Punjab Muslim family that has a direct lineage to Fatima, Prophet Mohammed's daughter. She was crippled from childhood and her mother died early. She earnestly desired to walk again. So, her father took her to the best hospitals in Pakistan and Britain and for prayers in Mecca- all to no avail. In December 1968, her father died. Although he left her a fortune, all she wanted was to walk.

Out of sheer helplessness, she began to talk to God. Just then, a low gentle voice from within her spoke to her in her language, Urdu, "I won't let you die. I will keep you alive." When she questioned who was speaking, the voice introduced himself as the one who gave eyes to the blind, healed the lepers and raised the dead, adding, "I am Jesus, son of Mary. Read about Me in the Quran, in the *Sura Maryam*" [p. 48]. So, three days after her father's death, Gulshan found herself buried in her *Urdu Quran*, reading avidly about Jesus Christ in *Sura Maryam*:

The angels said to Mary: Allah bids you rejoice in a Word from Him. His name is the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary. He shall be noble in this world and in the next, and shall be favoured by Allah [p. 51].

After three clear years, there was still no answer. As is common in Eastern religions, she woke up one night at 3 am to do her Quran studies, a chore that she was beginning to lose interest in doing because it looked fruitless. Just then, the whole room was filled with light, which was growing more and more bright. Even though the doors and windows to her room were shut fast, she became aware of twelve figures in a row with the thirteenth figure, larger and brighter than the others, standing in the middle. Jesus introduced Himself and His twelve apostles and told her to get up. After the third prompting, she stood up and her limbs straightened! Jesus put His hand on her head and she saw a hole in His

² Gulshan Esther & Thelma Sangster, *The Torn Veil*, London: Marshall Pickering; 1984; pp. 61-62

hand from which a ray of light struck down upon her green dress which now looked white. Jesus added:

*I am Jesus. I am Immanuel. I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. I am alive, and I am soon coming. See, from today you are My witness... Wherever you go I will be with you, and **from today you must pray like this: Our Father, which art in heaven...** [P.61]*

Gulshan added, “He made me repeat the prayer and it sank down into my heart and mind” (p. 62). That confirms that the Lord’s Prayer is a serious prayer and we must pay attention to *every word* therein.

In this week’s study, we shall focus on the section of the prayer that says, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Luke’s Gospel puts it this way, “Give us day by day our daily bread” [Lk 11: 3]. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus ended a discussion of the section on daily bread as follows: “Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. ***Sufficient for the day is its own trouble***” [Matt. 6: 34]. That is a challenge to our conventional thinking. We are raised to worry about and plan for our future, to be long-term oriented, and so on. But here, we are being told that we only have today to worry about and that when we pray to God, we should concentrate on asking just for today’s supply of our needs! Why should it be so?

2. Why you should focus only on today

In terms of times and seasons, we know that there are 24 hours in one day. In the story of creation, a day is measured as “the evening and the morning” [Gen. 1: 5]. But what is “today”? We understand it to mean our awake- hours, from sunrise to sunset. That view is supported by Jesus Himself where he said, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of the world” [Jn 11: 9]. So, ***we can define today as the daylight part of the current 24 hours during which we are awake and active. It is during that period that people go to work or school or perform other activities.***

If you examine the things that are giving you stress right now, you will find that they have to do with your future- what you will become (longevity questions) or where you will go when you die (eternity questions). Yet, the word of God has told us to pay attention to issues of today, not of tomorrow (future). Does that mean that we should be short-sighted or not to care at all about our future? No! It means that today is all the time that we have. It is our past, present and the future! Here are some reasons why that is so true:

- a) *Your yesterday no longer exists!*

When you slept last night, did you know where you went or where you were? Perhaps, the only evidence of your awareness was the dream that

you had or when you woke up occasionally to turn from one side to the other. So, when you woke up this morning, yesterday became a dim memory, no longer your reality. It is to be expected that some of the issues that you are dealing with this moment have to do with your memories of yesterday (past), such as regrets, broken promises or failures, dwindling opportunities or depleting reserves. If you bring such excess baggage into today, how do you intend to deal with today's unique concerns?

Rahab was a harlot. She gave up her trade and accepted the true God [**Josh. 2: 1, 9-14**]. If she had been stuck in her past, she might never have become part of the family tree of Jesus Christ [**Matt. 1: 5**]. The woman that David committed adultery with became the mother of King Solomon. Peter that denied Jesus thrice during His trial became the head of the disciples after Jesus had ascended into heaven. To those people, yesterday became a mere benign memory, not something to worry about. So, unless you declutter your today of yesterday's litter, you will begin today with a banging headache!

b) *Tomorrow is unknown*

If yesterday is a memory, tomorrow is a mirage, that is, something that appears to be real but it is merely imagined, an optical illusion. Without the benefit of a prophetic word, tomorrow is so uncertain that you can only talk about it in probabilities. On the subject, James has warned us [**Jam. 4: 13-14**]:

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit;" whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

For as long as we are in human form on earth, we worry about growing up (maturation) and building a career and a family (material prosperity). We impose time deadlines on ourselves and when they look difficult or impossible, we cut corners through greed or immoral conduct. In the end, we find that we cannot have peace of mind. That was why, at the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned His listeners [**Matt. 6: 25**]:

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

Most of us want to live long (70 years and beyond – **Ps. 90: 10**) but nobody has ever convinced me why s(he) wants to live long! Some claim that long life is a blessing from God [**Ps. 91: 16**] and yet the Son of God

died at age 33! The fundamental point is our human reluctance to die and yet, we do not know when, where or how we will die. In the end, we are operating in uncertainty. When you are not sure of your future, how can you act with confidence today? The rich fool planned to pull down his barn and build a bigger one to store his wealth for many years hence, relax, “eat, drink, and be merry.” But God told him, “Fool! This night, your soul will be required of you” [Lk 12: 16-20].

To make matters worse, we also worry about what happens to us after we are dead. Some people try to rationalize by claiming that there is no hereafter or no God or that we are going to reincarnate. The fact that your religion is based on your faith suggests a multiple view of eternity. But as people grow older, you can see fear and anxiety written over their faces! You cannot even plan for longevity because you do not know for how long you will live on earth. How then can you plan on your own terms for eternity which has no clock or time frame? Therefore, tomorrow does not exist for your use!

From the forgoing analysis, we can draw the following conclusions:

- ***The only time of your life that is certain is today, this moment.*** Yesterday is a memory and tomorrow is a blurred hope. That is why the word of God says, “***Today***, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion” [Ps. 95: 7; Heb. 3: 7-11].
- ***Your future is determined by the direction that you choose today.*** The Chinese say that the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. Unless you first choose a direction, that first step can be taken in 360 directions (360 degrees make a circle)! Therefore, you must know your priorities. Joshua challenged the children of Israel that he had led into the Promised Land, “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... (but) as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” [Josh. 24: 15]. Jesus has enjoined us to choose first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; then, all earthly pursuits and choices will dovetail into that [Matt. 6: 33].
- ***When God gives you the opportunity each day to wake up, see your activities each such day as “work-in-progress” to eternity.*** That way, no matter at what point that God calls you home, you will have no regrets. On that point, Paul wrote, “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, *whether present or absent*, to be well pleasing to Him” [2 Cor. 5: 8-9].
- Finally, stay the course because today is the beginning of the rest of your life. Since you do not know the day or the hour that the Lord will call you home, ***spend each day as your last, day by day.*** No matter for how long His promise tarries, wait for it because it will surely come. Continue to live by your faith [Hab. 2: 3-4] day by day, moment by moment.

3. Conclusion: Today is the only visible form of time!

Yesterday, today, tomorrow. Of those three, only today is visible. Past, present, future. Of those three, only the present is visible. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Of those three, only the Son, Jesus Christ, is visible. Interestingly, He has called Himself the Light of the world [**Jn 8: 12**], and has promised to be with us till the end of the age [**Matt. 28:20**]. When Philip (one of His disciples) once asked Him to show them the Father, He replied, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” [**Jn 14: 8-9**]. So, just as Jesus represents the Godhead in visible form, so does today represent time in its visible form. Therefore, today is all the time that you have just as Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever [**Heb. 13: 8**], the only way to the Father [**Jn 14: 6**]!

Thereafter, all you can ask or pray for is your daily bread as Jesus has taught in the Lord’s Prayer. Since man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God [**Deut. 8: 3; Matt. 4: 4**], your daily bread is both material and spiritual. Jesus has said, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world... Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” [**Jn 6: 51, 56**]. When you establish and maintain that desirable personal relationship with Jesus, He becomes your daily bread for longevity and eternity.

From now on, your priority becomes to do the will of God each new day [**Eccl. 12: 13; Rom. 12: 2**]. That means that your choices of earthly treasures will be guided by your desire to ultimately reside in God’s kingdom when your earthly journey is over [**Matt. 6: 19-20**]. That way, you can live one day at a time for the rest of your life here on earth, and enjoy praying, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

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