**There’s more to life than just food**

Text: Deuteronomy 8:3

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**Scriptures:** Matthew 6:5-13; Deuteronomy 8; John 6:47-51

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 65, 509, 107, 306, 530

**Series:** Heidelberg Catechism (LD50)

**Theme:** Through His prophet Moses, the Lord reminds the people of Israel of His 40-year work of humbling, testing and discipling His people as He fed them with manna from heaven so that they would trust Him to bring them into the promised land and know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

**Proposition:** When we pray ‘give us our daily bread’ we express our dependence on God and express our trust in Him for life; not only physically, but spiritually.

**Introduction**

As people became aware the threat of COVID-19 in New Zealand a few months ago there was a rush to buy supplies from supermarkets. Toilet paper in particular was in short supply for a while and bulk dried food like pasta and rice disappeared from the shelves. There was a lack of trust in the supply chains to keep delivering food to the retail outlets where we obtain products which are essential for life.

The anatomical and physiological processes by which our bodies process food so that our bodies can grow, continuously repair and be energised is very complex. We are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14). Yet, the basic principle is simple and straightforward: if we do not eat, we die.

This afternoon we consider the 4th petition of Lord’s prayer: *'Give us this day our daily bread’ (Matthew 6:11).* This is one of six petitions, or requests, in the Lord’s Prayer. The first three focus on God, the next three on mankind. This fourth request deals with our physical needs. The next two deal with our spiritual needs in this life: forgiveness and avoidance of temptation to sin.

This forth petition asks that God would, in the words of the Heidelberg Catechism: *“take care of all our physical needs” (HCLD50).* We are going to look at this part of the Lord’s Prayer from our text in Deuteronomy 8:3 “*And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD*”. We’ll do this under two headings:

1. Trusting the Lord for our physical needs
2. Trusting the Lord for our spiritual needs
3. **Trusting the Lord for our physical needs**

In Deuteronomy, the Lord speaks to His people at the end of their 40 years of living in the wilderness. They are still ‘en route’ from the captivity of Egypt to the abundance of the promised land of Canaan. God calls them to trust Him by trusting His Word. He explains that this is the pathway of life and blessing. “*The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers*”. He calls them to **remember** how He had provided for their physical needs by miraculously providing manna, heavenly bread, when they hungered.

God did not supply this food by stocking up a storehouse like the ones which Joseph had filled with grain during the seven years of plenty in the land of Egypt so that there would be a supply for the following seven years of famine (Gen 47). Instead, God’s provision would be made on a daily basis as he explained 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, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily*" (Exo 16:4-5).

God has always provided the food which mankind eats, either directly and miraculously, as with the manna, or through the food production processes which He has designed into this creation. He said to our first ancestors *"Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you*” (Gen 1:29).

We all need regular nutrient input to survive bodily. There is no other way to live this life. This ongoing, constant necessity is reflected in the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer: *'Give us this day our* ***daily*** *bread*” (Matthew 6:11) Literally in the original language is “Our bread, **daily**, give to us **today**”. There is a redundancy of words here which emphasises the pressing need for our bodies to be sustained.

Remember that life for most people in the 1st century was literally lived on a daily basis. Daily wages were enshrined in the currency. The denarius coin was the daily pay for Roman soldiers and the financial remuneration for the day-labourers in Palestine (Mat 20:2). Many people back then and there had a “hand-to-mouth” lifestyle with little savings, little food storage, little ‘buffer’ for times of famine, illness or when age made working long hours more and more difficult. There were no fridges or freezers, most homes had no large pantries. There was no unemployment benefit, no paid sick days, no Accident Compensation Corporation. The words “*Our bread,* ***daily****, give to us* ***today***” would have impacted more then than they do for most of us now.

However, whilst it is harder for many of us to grasp such a ‘hand-to-mouth’ existence, there are more and more families and children who are going hungry in NZ, foodbanks are in greater demand. This is especially true as a result of the economic effects of the pandemic coupled with high levels of personal debt. Yet for most of us we are wrapped up in so much material comfort and security that it is easy for us to forget that we need God to care for our bodies. When we pray *'Give us this day our* ***daily*** *bread*” we express our complete dependence on the Lord, and we express our **trust** in Him for life. Trust is a confident expectation in the honesty, integrity, and reliability of the person or thing trusted.

The Old Testament Israelites demonstrated a stunning lack of trust in the Lord when they grumbled about the Lord’s daily provision of heavenly bread, just after they had been dramatically delivered from Egypt. We read in the book of Numbers that they had a strong craving and said "*Oh that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at*." (Num 11:4-6). Had the Lord met their need for food in the barren wilderness? Absolutely, yes. They had sufficient every day to sustain them over the 40-year period,

In the Lord’s prayer the word “bread” speaks of necessities, not of luxuries. Bread stands for what is essential for bodily life. Had the Lord met all the Israelites ‘wants’ for food? No. They preferred the more varied diet of Egypt, even though it was part of a life of enslavement and hard labour. They had so easily and so quickly forgotten what the Lord had graciously saved them from. Their memories were dangerously selective. They did not trust that the Lord to meet all their needs. They did not trust that the Lord would lead them safely into the promised land.

When the spies returned, they all (apart from Joshua and Caleb) did not trust the strength of the Lord to overcome the inhabitants of the land. All the people grumbled again saying: "*Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt*." (Num 14:2b-4).

It was because of this first generation’s lack of trust in the Word of the Lord that almost none of them, including Moses entered the promised land; the only exceptions being Joshua and Caleb. It was the children of those adults who left Egypt who came into the land which God described as a place where there would be plenty of food in abundance: “*For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing…. And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. "Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them…you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery*” (Deut 8:7-14).

Today, we are not journeying through a physical wilderness, heading for a physical promised land, but we are journeying through this life, dependent upon the Lord to provide our needs or both body and soul. When we pray the 4th petition, we are asking God to “*Help us to give up our trust in creatures and to put trust in You alone*”. We need God to sustain us daily/hourly/for every moment. We need to use what God has graciously provided to care for our bodies. Food in the right quantities; a healthy and balanced diet. Exercise to keep body and mind active. Remember that the Old Testament Israelites did not stay in their tents all day, but went out six days a week to gather up the manna from around their campsite (Exo 16:16). The Lord provided a regular exercise program for them too!

We are to diligently care for our own bodies so that we can be as effective as possible for service. Caring for our bodies involves both God as the Provider and ourselves as those who use God’s resources wisely. Christ expects that we share what He has given to us with others who lack. In the Sermon on the Mount He said,"*So* ***when*** *you give to the poor*” (Matthew 6:2). The giving of food to those in need is one of the works of faith which Christ identifies when He speaks about the coming Day of Judgement: *'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in’* (Matthew 25:35). Sharing the food with which we have been blessed with members of this congregation, with strangers and with visitors is part of the Bible’s teaching about hospitality (e.g. Romans 12:13).

When we pray as a gathered congregation “*Give* ***us*** *this day* ***our*** *daily bread*”, you or I may be the means by which God provides someone else with some food! We may be the answer to our own prayer! The spiritual needs of human beings, made in God’s image, are identified by the Word of the Lord in our text: *“man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD’.* Which brings us to our second point.

1. **Trusting the Lord for our spiritual needs**

Christ Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days, 40 nights without food. Being fully human, like you and me, He was hungry.We read in Matthew’s gospel that “*the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread. But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"* (Matt 4:3-4). Christ trusted in His Heavenly Father to provide when tempted to sustain Himself by following the command of Satan.

Just as Adam had been tempted to feed himself from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil back in the garden of Eden, even when there was plenty of permissible food to eat. There in the wilderness, Jesus did exactly what He had told His disciples to do in the sermon on the Mount: “*do not be anxious 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?*” (Matt 6.25). “*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*” (Matt 6:33).

Again, brothers and sisters, we see that Jesus does not ask of us anything which He Himself has not been willing and able to do. He calls us to trust God for our basic physical needs: food, drink, clothing. He calls us to trust Him for our spiritual needs, for man does not live by bread alone. We are more than physical beings; we are body AND soul. We need both physical AND spiritual sustenance to survive.

After miraculously feeding 5,000 people with bread and fish, Jesus said: *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.* ***I am the bread of life****. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."* (John 6:47-51a).

Brothers and sisters, Jesus has given Himself as our ‘spiritual nutrition’. He, and He alone, enables us to live spiritually – that is not to be estranged from God. He, and He alone, provides for our spiritual needs through the ongoing work of His Word and Spirit.

Just as God called the Old Testament Israelites to remember the ‘*whole way that the Lord your God has led you through these forty years in the wilderness that he might humble you, testing you to know what is in your heart*’ (Deut 8.2), so, the Lord calls us to **remember** His past provision. He has provided all that you have needed for physical life. However, thismay not always have been in ways that you wanted. Your physical diet may not have been always to your liking. Your health may not have been as strong and pain free as you would have wanted. Your body may not have been the size, strength or shape that you might have desired. The aging process may have affected you in ways that you did not anticipate and which you find difficult and challenging. However, the Lord has provided for all your bodily needs, not necessarily your wants, even ‘*though our outer nature is wasting away*’ (2 Cor 4:16). The Lord calls us to remember His past provision and to be thankful not to be discontent and grumble.

If you have come to Christ in repentance and faith, He has provided all that you have needed for spiritual life: If you have not already done so, you must. I implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20). Come to Christ. He is the bread of life, as He said, ‘*whoever believes has eternal life’* (John 6:47).

The Heidelberg Catechism (LD50) teaches us that when we pray ‘*Give us this day our daily bread*” we are asking God: *“Do take care of all our physical needs so that we come to know that You are the only source of everything good, and that neither our work and worry nor Your gifts can do us any good without Your blessing”.*

Ultimately it will do you no lasting good to have physical food to eat now if you die later. We need more than just ‘bread’ to live, we need ‘*every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord*’. These words of God are only found in the Bible. Do you know how many words there are in this book? The Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek text totals about 545,202 words. In English, the exact number depends on the translation! The King James version has 783,137 words.

However, the main message of the Bible can be summed up in just a very few words: God created this universe to be very good. The first human beings, Adam and Eve, rebelled against God by eating forbidden food. However, because of His great love, He has chosen to rescue a chosen people for Himself through the person and work of His Son Jesus Christ and to bring them into a new creation where they will live forever. In the New Earth there will be a river, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. On either side of this river there will be the tree of life, with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month (Rev 22:2). God will continue there to give us our ‘daily bread’ for eternity.

If God did not sustain us, we could not come to Christ. If God did not sustain us, we could not serve Christ. In this life, food is fuel for following the Saviour. In the next life, food is fuel for enjoying eternity with the Lord. This is the paradise to which the promised land of Canaan pointed. A land “*of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing….”* (Deut 8:7-9).

I am looking forward to eating good food in the presence of the Saviour in the Paradise to come. How about you?

AMEN.