



## **Our Daily Bread**

### **WE EARN IT, DON'T WE?**

Most of us do, certainly. We might be in employment, or married and caring for the home and children of our working partner and ourselves. We might have 'earned the right to it' before reaching pensionable age. Or there might be a few who, like Paul, because their work did not carry a wage, were entitled to expect those whom they served to keep them alive-whether they made use of the privilege or not. But yes, generally speaking, most of us work hard enough for our daily bread. (1 Corinthians 9:1-18; 1 Timothy 5:17-18)

Paul, indeed, gave instructions that the deliberately lazy person had no right to expect others to provide his food though he also made it plain that needy people should be maintained by their relations, or if necessary by the congregations or believers of which they were members. (2 Thessalonians 3:8-12; 1 Timothy 5:3-16)

### **BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE HAVE A RIGHT TO IT**

Many people in the poorer countries work much harder than those in wealthier lands, and get much less in return. However little we understand it, there is no straight relationship between how hard one works and how much one gets to eat. Besides, it only needs a famine, a fire or a flood, and the food supply vanishes. And that is one reason why even the most comfortably placed among us needs to pray. "Give us this day, our daily bread". (Matthew 6:11; Luke 11:3)

But it isn't just that God could withhold the food we have earned. He it is who made us capable of earning it, and made us for His good pleasure. (Revelation 4:11)

Our food, our property, our lives and our activities, all really belong to Him. They did belong to Him even when we did not confess it, before we accepted His allegiance; they do so doubly now that we must confess, "Ye are not your own; ye are bought

with a price.” That is, the food belongs to God, and it is granted to people who belong to God. (1 Corinthians 7:23; 6:19)

It is our right and duty to use it in God’s service, and if God is willing, to allow us to take pleasure in His good gifts and find personal happiness in the eating of them and in the use we make of their strength, then that is a ground for thanksgiving. “God has created them to be received with thanksgiving by them that believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified through the word of God and prayer.” (1 Timothy 4:3-4)

No: we have no right to it. We are right to be thankful when we get it: all else would be stealing from our Maker. Anything short of unfeigned gratitude and a hearty sacrifice of praise is a kind of robbery. (Malachi 3:7-12)

### **AND WE MUST NOT TRUST IN IT**

For this is what the man did who pulled down his barns and built greater. His “much goods” might have lasted many years, but they fed other mouths than his own. Whatever insurance we may take out for long and comfortable evening years, it has no value at all when God withdraws His breath from us. And time spent in the idolatrous accumulation of wanted things, food or the means of buying food, is time that contributes nothing to our own well being or to the glory of God. (Luke 12:16-21; Matthew 6:19-21; James 5:1-3)

For daily bread, good though it is, and right though it is that we should be grateful for it, is of very limited use.

“Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall bring to nought both it and them.” (1 Corinthians 6:13)

Never was that better brought home than on the day following the Feeding of the Five Thousand. Jesus had been happy to provide food for the multitude who had travelled so far to see and hear him. He had been unwilling to let them appoint him King, for not only was this not the time, but to be crowned on such a basis was to become the slave of their appetites. If the people made Jesus King because he provided them with food, there was an implied contract; that he would continue to provide them with it; and this the Lord was not prepared to do. (John 6:5; John 6:15; Mark 6:34-37)

Indeed, with an almost disparaging reference to his own mighty miracle, he told them that it would be useless: “Labour not for the meat that perisheth!” (John 6:27; John 6:31)

Barley loaves, even miraculously multiplied, could do no better than stave off death,

and when the Jews pointed to the manna from heaven as an even greater miracle, the Lord used this also to drive home his point: “Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness; and they died.” All that generation died in disgrace, although “He gave them bread from heaven to eat.” (John 6:49; Nehemiah 9:15; Psalm 78:24-25; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4)

## **MAN DOES NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE**

The episode in the Wilderness showed that. The coming and going of all our generations shows it too, with ourselves marked out as future victims of the universal law.

But the law can be defeated. If God could keep Israel from starvation by raining down miraculous bread, without going through the process of sowing, reaping, winnowing, grinding and baking; then He could do even more if they would have it, and this was the purpose of the miracle, “that ye might know that man cloth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord”. (Ecclesiastes 1:4; Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4)

This does not just mean that life is not complete unless you have the word of God to eat as well as earthly bread; it means that life is not being lived at all unless you have the one in addition to the other. Jesus lived forty days in the wilderness sustained by the Word alone. He was content to wait without impatience for natural food as he experienced the truth, “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to accomplish His work.” And this is the food which he offers to his disciples as the Bread from heaven, which a man may eat of and never hunger, believe in and never thirst. (Matthew 4:2; John 4:31-34; John 6:33-35)

It is not exactly that one does not feel hungry or thirsty. Hunger is a very pleasant feeling to have when you know that the meal is on the way, and can smell its savours afar off; thirst is a delightful sensation when something good to drink lies ready to hand. Both are less pleasant when there is not enough food and drink to be had, but this is never so with the Word of God:

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” (Matthew 5:6)

The Lord did not mean that those who came to him would lose their appetites: he meant that if we have an appetite for the things he offers, we shall be abundantly satisfied with what we get.

## **WORKING UP AN APPETITE**

“Every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God” is richly represented in the

Bible. Its kings were taught to write their own copy and have it handy that they might meditate in it day and night: every man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly finds his delight in it and does the same. (Deuteronomy 17:18; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2)

Having a printed Bible so easily available allows us the same opportunity of daily consideration, and prayerful reading of it means daily dedication to the God who speaks through His Word. Happy is the believer who has lived in youth in a home where “from a child” he has “known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make” him “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”. Blessed are the parents who make known unto their children God’s truth by making this their habit. Long routine might have dulled our appetite: children can find stale that which their fathers in the day of first discovery found exciting. And it is always, sadly, true that the natural man receives not the things of God, and needs practice in those things which are spiritually discerned, and practice in prayer, too, that the discernment and the appetite might be granted to him. It is the rare person who can pick up the Bible and at once find it so enthralling that he cannot put it down. But the spiritual child diligently suckled with the milk of the Word grows to desire it, and, graduating from it, to savour with increasing enjoyment the strong meat which follows. (2 Timothy 3:15)

“How sweet are Thy words unto my taste ! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth.” That is how all men of God esteem the spiritual food they are graciously granted to eat: even those who, like John, must then use the wisdom they have gained in order to rebuke and warn the disobedient and unbelieving world in which they live. (Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:7; Isaiah 38:9)

## **YE OUGHT TO BE TEACHERS**

That is the reproof given by the Word of God to those who receive the Word of God and are content to leave it so, growing not at all, and careless of the need to pass on the Word further to others. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

The disciple of the Lord Jesus is not expected to be a spiritual cul-de-sac, but must be a thoroughway into which the Word enters, and from which it passes to become fruitful in others. “The Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him that heareth say, Come!” They who drink of the water of life must also draw from its fountains and provide gladly for the thirst of those around them. (Ephesians 3:14-21; 1 Peter 2:2; 1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:14; Psalm 119:103; Psalm 19:10; Revelation 10:9-11; Ezekiel 3:3; Hebrews 5:12-14)

The blessing which the Lord promises to those who give to one of the least of his brethren the cup of cold water to drink, must be theirs in double measure who proffer the water of life to those in this world who are dying in a thirsty land from a drought of the Word of God. We who have drunk of God’s fountain are expected to become fountains in our turn, whose water springs up into a fountain of eternal life for those

who will come and drink at our invitation. (Revelation 22:17; Matthew 25:35-37; Mark 9:41; Psalm 63:1; 143:6; John 4:14)

A Brotherhood whose members lose the desire to become so skilled in the Word which has enlightened them, that they can do for others as they have received, is a Brotherhood which has forgotten its calling and is certain to lapse into ruin. It is a city hid in a valley in the smog of its own worldly industry; it is a lampstand selfishly curtained to give light only in the owner's private chamber instead of shining out as a light of the world. The figure of speech which represents the Congregations of the Lord as lightstands is deliberately chosen, and lightstands which go out must be moved out of their place when they cease to give light. But a congregation of dedicated believers with oil in their individual lamps will together, by their witness, be a burning, shining light in the darkness.

### **IN PLAIN WORDS**

Our daily bread is the gift of God. We labour for it that we may not steal it from Him. We are blessed to enjoy it and called upon to give thanks for it. But it must not be the be-all and end-all of our lives; if it is this it becomes the meat that perisheth. (Matthew 5:14-15; Luke 8:16; 11:33; Revelation 1:12)

The Scriptures are our daily spiritual food. Only from these can we obtain strength to run the race for life. We would be merely relapsed worldlings were we to forsake or neglect this, our truest food from God. Our Lord has taken the needful steps to provide food for the life of the world. (Matthew 5:16; Philippians 2:15; John 5:35)

From his richly multiplied food we have gathered up each his basket, and, with his pattern before us and his call to urge us, the message comes to us all (John 6:51; Mark 6:37; Matt 14:16)

“Give ye them to eat!”

*A.D. Norris*

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