

Dear members and friends of St. John,

"Give us this day our daily bread." If we've prayed this once, we've prayed this ten thousand times. What is "daily bread", anyway? Dr. Luther gives us insight with his response: "daily bread" is *"everything that belongs to the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, field, cattle, money, goods, a pious spouse, pious children, pious servants, pious and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like."* (Luther's Small Catechism). "Great!" we say. "Finally God is giving me my reward for being a faithful follower of Christ!" "Right?" Wrong. Luther reminds us: *"God gives daily bread, even without our prayer, to all wicked people..."* (Luther's Small Catechism). Wait a minute – wicked people get what we get?

This concept of God providing the **same earthly blessings** to the **wicked**, that He provides to the **devout Christian** - gives many people pause. Why? Because entire church bodies are built around the concept that the **more** that we do to **earn** God's love and kindness, the **more** God will pour out His blessings on us. The opposite is also taught: the **more** you sin or disobey God, the **more** He will punish you, by withholding "daily bread" from you. This theology or belief-system is very, very prevalent in Christianity today. Turn-on Christian TV and you are bound to hear some TV pastor tell you that the only thing that is stopping you from **prosperity** is....[this is usually where they tell you you're not giving enough money to their ministry, or you're not praying the right prayer, or you're not sincere enough in your pursuit of a personal relationship with God]. Is that what the word of God says?

Jesus tells us, from His Sermon on the Mount, *"But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his **sun** rise on **the evil** and **on the good**, and sends **rain** on **the just** and **on the unjust**"* (Matt. 5:44-45) God has mercy on **all** men – Christian and non-Christian – bestowing His blessings on everyone. We ask, "Even all wicked people?" Yes.

Before we get too indignant at God's seemingly flippant gift-giving, we should consider what our lives would have looked like without God's generosity toward us. You see, you and I were born into sin. We did not come out of our mother's womb with faith in Jesus as our Savior. St. Paul reminds us, that, *"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8) Our Lord came down from a peaceful and perfect heaven, to take on human flesh, suffer and die. All was done so we could go free. "Well, at least we're on equal footing, in terms of earthly blessings, with the unbeliever that lives down the street, right?" Uh, no.

You see, the call to Christian discipleship is a call to **suffer**. From Romans chapter 8, *"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided **we suffer** with him in order that we may also be **glorified** with him. For I consider that **the sufferings** of this present time are not worth comparing with the **glory** that is to be revealed to us"* (Romans 8:16-18) It turns out that true Christianity leads to a life of self-denial, and even hurt that comes to us from a world that hates us for following Christ.

Just before Jesus eats His last meal prior to the cross, He tells His disciples the following: *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you"* (John 15:18-19) Wow. So not only do we deny ourselves some of the "worldly pleasures" found in focusing on "self" (instead of God and others), we also must live with hate directed at us for being Christian.

[If you think that, up to this point, I haven't built a very convincing argument for Christianity – I'd have to agree with you.]

But wait! – there's more! St. Paul states, *"Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches"* (2 Corinthians 11:24-28). This all happened due to Paul's steely determination to follow Christ. Then there's his chronic health condition (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Suffering from a "thorn in his flesh", Paul pleads with God to remove it. God replies that it's for Paul's good. Why? When Paul is weak, suffering, dependant on God, then God's strength and power is revealed in him. When Paul is weak, then he is "strong."

That leads us to something that we haven't considered: **God's spiritual blessings that only come to His faithful people.** Considering all that he had gone through, Paul said, *"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have **suffered the loss of all things** and count them as rubbish, in order that **I may gain Christ.**"* (Phil. 3:8) We, like Paul, live in a state of Grace – God's unprecedented forgiveness for all of our sins. We have the fruits of the Spirit, including love, joy, peace and patience. We have hope for the future – not some worldly, flippant hope – but a sure and certain hope that this short life of suffering will be replaced with an eternity in heaven! We are children of God – we have His promise of physical and spiritual blessings that will last for eternity! Nothing in this world can compare to our life in Christ. Nothing.

"Give us this day our daily bread." Luther's right when he states that God gives us daily blessings even without our prayer. Then, why pray this prayer? In doing so, we ask God to help us realize this (that we don't deserve God's blessings any more than wicked unbelievers do) and to receive our "daily bread" with thanksgiving. God is the giver of all good gifts. The greatest of these gifts is faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Every other worldly gift, whether it comes or passes us by, cannot compare with our future life in heaven with Jesus. Help me, Lord, to see myself as a sinner that doesn't deserve Your blessings, and to never forget the true "Bread of Life," who came down to save me. Jesus said, *"This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever"* (John 6:58). Thanks be to God!

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