

**Intro:**

Today our message on prayer is brought to our attention first of all by the Lord's feeding of the 5,000. We have four texts; each one of them mentions the same prayer the Lord offered. Let's look at them all, ending up in John's Gospel.

Read Mt 14.19; Lk 9.16; Mk 6.41; Jn 6.11

What do you think of praying before meals? I am sure you think it is a positive and spiritual thing to do. ... But now the sticky question:

*Do you think when praying before meals?*

Ah, preacher, you just left preachin' and are a gone to meddlin'!

Our message isn't so much about the prayer Jesus prayed on this occasion as it is the kind of prayer it was.

I don't think any of you think that the Lord had to pray in order to feed the 5,000, do you?

What we have here is a prayer of thanksgiving for food. Such a prayer is entirely in keeping with Jewish tradition and the OT scriptures.

It seems to me that I preached a message on this once in the past, but I couldn't find it in my notes. It could be that it was pre-computer!

Have you ever wondered if there is a Bible command to pray before meals? I am not sure there is, although it is certainly *assumed* and we are certainly given several examples of it.

The prayer before meals is probably **our most frequent prayer**, and is probably thought **the least of our prayers**.

This attitude we have is probably a mistake. Because we make these prayers so frequently, we are likely guilty of praying without thought, with no preparation, and with vain repetition.

In this message I want to look at the verses in the New Testament that refer to prayer before meals, then look at the verses that teach us something about prayer before meals. We'll close with some application and suggestions for improving these prayers.

**Proposition:** Your prayers before meals may be a measure of the state of your spiritual life.

## I. Examples of prayer before meals

A. We read the prayers before the feeding of the 5,000

B. Before feeding the 4,000

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**Matthew 15:36** And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake *them*, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

**Mark 8:7** And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before *them*. **6** And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before *them*; and they did set *them* before the people.

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1. Do you think the crowd thought it a little unusual to see Jesus standing before them, with *so small* a meal, and offering a blessing for it?
2. Jesus may have uttered a traditional Jewish prayer on this occasion – we don't know for certain
  - a. You can find many written prayers to offer before meals

As in everything, my brother and I had competing prayers to 'say grace' before meals. I forget what his was. Mine was "God is great, God is good, Let us thank him for our food".

- b. Such prayers can be useful, but they *very* easily become vain repetition

C. Before First Communion Meal

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**Matthew 26:26** ¶ And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed *it*, and brake *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. **27** And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;

**Luke 22:19** And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake *it*, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. **20** Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup *is* the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

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**Mark 14:22** ¶ And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake *it*, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. **23** And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave *it* to them: and they all drank of it.

**1 Corinthians 11:24** And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. **25** After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me.

1. The disciples would not have been surprised at these prayers, and these almost certainly would have been typical prayers of the day

“As detailed in the earliest Jewish record of ordinances—the *Mishnah*—the service of the Paschal Supper was exceedingly simple. Indeed, the impression left on the mind is, that, while all the observances were fixed, the prayers, with some exceptions preserved to us, were free.”<sup>1</sup>

2. The significance of these prayers, for the disciples, was the finality of them in the Lord’s comments afterwards

“Turning to the Gospels, the words which follow the record of the benediction on the part of Christ seem to imply, that Jesus had, at any rate, so far made use of the ordinary thanksgiving as to speak both these benedictions. We know, indeed, that they were in use before His time, since it was in dispute between the Schools of Hillel and Shammai, whether that over the wine or that over the day should take precedence. That over the wine was quite simple: “Blessed art Thou, Jehovah our God, Who hast created the fruit of the Vine!” The formula was so often used in blessing the cup, and is so simple, that we need not doubt that these were the very words spoken by our Lord. It is otherwise as regards the benediction “over the day,” which is not only more composite, but contains words expressive of Israel’s national pride and self-righteousness, such as we cannot think would have been uttered by our Lord. With

<sup>1</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ*. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2003). 236.

this exception, however, they were no doubt identical in contents with the present formula. This we infer from what the Lord added, as He passed the cup round the circle of the disciples.<sup>2</sup> No more, so He told them, would He speak the benediction over the fruit of the vine - not again utter the thanks "over the day" that they had been "preserved alive, sustained, and brought to this season." Another Wine, and at another Feast, now awaited Him - that in the future, when the Kingdom would come. It was to be the last of the old Paschas; the first, or rather the symbol and promise, of the new. And so, for the first and last time, did He speak the twofold benediction at the beginning of the Supper."<sup>3</sup>

I don't want to lose our focus too much on this point, but the occasion is quite poignant for us as believers.

- Our Lord was about to taste death for every man, so that we could eat the meal of everlasting life.

#### D. Paul prays on board the sinking ship before they hit Malta

**Acts 27:35** And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken *it*, he began to eat.

1. Praying at such a time? Eating at such a time?
2. Believing God at such a time!

Believing God should be the meaning of your prayers before meals.

<sup>2</sup> Edersheim: 'I have often expressed my conviction that in the ancient Services there was considerable elasticity and liberty left to the individual. At present a cup is filled for each individual, but Christ seems to have passed the one cup round among the Disciples. Whether such was sometimes done, or the alteration was designedly, and as we readily see, significantly, made by Christ, cannot now be determined.'

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Galaxie Software, 2002; 2002). 5:817.

## II. Assumption of prayer before meals

### A. In the instruction on handling differences

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**Romans 14:6** He that regardeth the day, regardeth *it* unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard *it*. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

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### B. In the instruction on meats offered to idols (read context: 1 Cor 10.25-31)

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**1 Corinthians 10:30** For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks?

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1. Meat not specifically in use in the idol's temple is permissible to eat – unless someone asks a question about it (betraying a consciousness of the idol)
2. The idea of v. 30 is “why should I be spoken evil of by associating the Lord's name in prayer with something someone has a question about?”

For this message, though, the significant point is the assumption that I give thanks for the things I eat.

### C. In the instruction against those who make religious prohibition against foods

Not necessarily meats; it could be any dietary restriction for religious reasons, although the context may mean meat as we understand it here.

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**1 Timothy 4:3** Forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.  
**4** For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: **5** For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

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1. God intends food to be received with thanksgiving
2. The prayer ‘sanctifies’ the food: sets it apart for holy use
  - a. What holy use?
  - b. The holy use of the holy life a Christian is supposed to lead in the energy supplied by his food

### III. Suggestions for prayer before meals

“Family worship, as the name imports, is the joint worship rendered to God, by all the members of one household. There is an irresistible impulse to pray for those whom we love; and not only to pray for them, but with them. There is a natural as well as a gracious prompting to pray with those who are near to us. Prayer is a social exercise. The prayer which our Lord taught His disciples bears this stamp on every petition. It is this principle which leads to the united devotions of church assemblies and which immediately manifests itself in Christian families.”<sup>4</sup>

#### A. Thoughtful prayer before meals is part of family worship

1. Take (or think of) one or two requests before you pray
  - a. Family needs
  - b. Church needs
  - c. Missionary needs
2. Teach your children to pray thoughtful prayers

#### B. Pray on purpose, not on duty and by rote

1. Commit yourself to the Lord’s service in these prayers
2. Ask for the Lord’s guidance, direction, blessing on your own life, plans, duties

### Conclusion:

I remember the first time I was off by myself in a restaurant.

- No one was watching.
- I wrestled within myself about how I should pray. I am afraid I settled for the ‘hand on the brow, hope no one will see me’ kind of prayer.

I find now that I am too familiar with my lord, so familiar that I sometimes forget to pray.

May God help us to sanctify him in our hearts and let us use our meals to do it.

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<sup>4</sup> J. W. Alexander, “The History of Family Worship”, <http://www.apuritansmind.com/TheChristianFamily/AlexanderJWHistoryFamilyWorship.htm> (Accessed 4/13/08).