

## Saying Grace Before Meals

'In the morning dew lay around the camp. When the dew had gone, behold on the surface of the wilderness was a small round thing, small as the frost on the ground. When the Children of Israel saw it they asked one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread God has given to you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded, "Gather it up, everyone according to what they can eat. One omer (roughly 6 pints or 3 litres) per person, according to the number of your persons, you will take it, everyone for those who are in your tent." The Children of Israel did so and gathered it up, some more and some less. When they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over and those who gathered little had no lack ... They gathered it morning by morning, everyone according to what they could eat. When the sun grew hot it melted. On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each person. Moses said to them, "This is what the Lord has said, 'Tomorrow is a solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. Bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. What remains over, lay up for yourselves to be kept until the morning.'" They laid it up until the morning as Moses asked and it did not become foul, nor was there any worm in it. Moses said, "Eat that today for today is a Sabbath to the Lord. Today you will not find it in the field. Six days you will gather it but on the seventh day is the Sabbath and there will be none." ... The house of Israel called it Manna (meaning, "What is it?"). It was like coriander seed, white and it tasted like wafers with honey ... The Children of Israel ate the Manna for forty years, until they came to an inhabited land' (Exodus 16:13 to 26, 31 & 35). 'The Manna was like coriander seed and its appearance was like bdellium (onyx). The people went about and gathered it, ground it in mills, beat it in mortars, boiled it in pots, made cakes of it and its taste was as the taste of fresh oil. When dew fell on the camp in the night the Manna fell with it' (Numbers 11:7 to 9). 'The Manna ceased the next day after they had eaten of the produce of the land. The Children of Israel did not have Manna any more but they ate of the fruit of the land that year' (Joshua 5:12).

This supernatural food given to the Children of Israel was life saving nourishment. After forty years of eating Manna the Children of Israel became tired of it and complained. They were not at all thankful for the bread. 'We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic but now our soul is dried away and there is nothing at all but this Manna to look on' (Numbers 11:5 & 6). Manna was a food never previously seen or eaten by humans before the Children of Israel received it. It was more than just supernatural, it was the same food holy angels eat in heaven. 'God rained down Manna on them to eat and gave them food from the sky. Man ate the bread of holy angels. God sent them food to the full' (Psalm 78:24 & 25). 'They asked ... and God satisfied them with the bread of the heavens' (Psalm 105:40). The Manna was the first time God gave daily bread. The Children of Israel had to gather up their Manna early every morning but there were times when God let them go hungry to humble them and to force them to rely on Him for everything. God likens food we eat to the spiritual food we need. It is good to thank the Lord for our food because without food we would starve but we need to understand, walking with God is more than just food. 'God humbled you and allowed you to hunger and fed you with Manna, food you did not know neither did your fathers know, so He might make you know, mankind does not live by bread alone but by every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God does man live' (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Much later, Jesus quoted the same verse. "It is written, 'Man will not live by bread alone but by every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4). In the Lord's Prayer Jesus said, "Give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11) but Luke wrote, "Give us day by day our daily bread" (Luke 11:3). Jesus also supernaturally fed thousands of followers with fish and bread. He thanked the Lord then blessed the food. 'Jesus saw a great multitude of people. He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd so He began to teach them many things. When it was late in the day, Jesus' disciples came to Him and said, "This place is deserted and it is late in the day. Send them away so they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread for they have nothing to eat."

Jesus answered, "You give them something to eat."

The disciples asked Him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?"

Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see."

When they knew they said, "Five loaves and two fish."

Jesus commanded everyone to sit down in groups on the green grass. They sat down in groups by hundreds and by fifties. Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He gave to His disciples to set before the people and He divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were filled. They took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and also of the fish. Those who ate the loaves and fish were about five thousand people' (Mark 6:34 to 44). The Bible does not say if the fish was raw or cooked but since the bread was obviously cooked, we can assume the fish was also cooked and ready to eat. Some time later, Jesus did the same thing again, feeding thousands with a small amount of bread and fish.

'In those days when there was a very great multitude and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "I have compassion on the multitude because they have stayed with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away fasting to their home they will faint on the way for some of them have come a long way."

His disciples answered Him, "From where could one satisfy these people with bread here in a deserted place?" (Surprisingly, the disciples had completely forgotten about the previous feeding miracle.)

Jesus asked them, "How many loaves do you have?"

They said, "Seven."

Jesus commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground and He took the seven loaves. Having given thanks, He broke them and gave them to His disciples to serve the multitude. They had a few small fish. Having blessed them, He said to serve these also. They ate and were filled. They took up seven baskets of broken pieces that were left over. Those who had eaten were about four thousand people, then Jesus sent them away' (Mark 8:1 to 9). Notice, each time they ate, Jesus offered thanks for the food.

Blessing our food by saying grace before meals is a lovely example of blessing God every day for His provisions. It is right to thank the Lord for our food but it is not right to cause others to falter in their faith by eating foods that may offend them. If some feel it is all right to eat meat, no one has the right to tell them they cannot. Those who are vegetarians have no right to tell meat eaters to stop. Everything edible is good for food and if it is received with gratitude it is sanctified by prayer. 'The Holy Spirit says expressly, in later times some will fall away from the faith ... commanding some to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. Every creature of God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving for it is sanctified through the Word of God and prayer' (1 Timothy 4:1 to 5). 'Accept a person who is weak in faith ... One man has faith to eat all things but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Do not let those who eat meat despise those who do not eat meat. Do not let those who do not eat meat judge those who eat it, for God has accepted them all ... Those who eat, eat to the Lord for they give God thanks. Those who do not eat (if they fast, they fast) to the Lord and give God thanks ... If because of food your brother is grieved, you no longer walk in love. Do not destroy (their faith) with your food, those for whom Jesus died ... The Kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit ... Do not overthrow God's work for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, however it is evil for a man to create a stumbling block by eating (certain foods). It is good to not eat meat, drink wine nor do anything if it causes your brother to stumble, be offended or is made weak (in the faith)' (Romans 14:1 to 3, 6, 15, 17, 20 & 21).

Blessing our food is not mandatory but it is good humble practice. Jesus is our example and He always gave thanks for the food and the water they drank with meals. The apostles also gave thanks for their food. 'When Paul had taken bread he gave thanks to God in the presence of all and he broke it then began to eat. They all cheered up and they also took food' (Acts 27:35 & 36). We know the Lord is the One Who provides food for all of His creation so we should show our gratitude. 'God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed, which is on the surface of all the earth and every tree which bears fruit yielding seed. It will be your food. To every animal of the earth, to every bird of the sky and to everything that creeps on the earth in which there is life, I have given every green plant for food," and it was so' (Genesis 1:29 & 30). "Every animal that lives will be food for you. As the green plant, I have given everything to you" (Genesis 9:3). It is the Lord Who provides the rain and sunshine to make the vegetables and fruit grow. He provided the ground where livestock can feed. He created cows and goats to give us milk, cheese and other dairy products. He created hens to give us eggs. He created fish and the oceans so we can enjoy seafood. Even processed food is based on something the Lord created. Animals and birds do not know how to thank God but as humans we have the ability to be grateful. 'Consider the ravens. They do not sow, they do not reap, they have no warehouse or barn and God feeds them. How much more valuable are you than birds' (Luke 12:24). After Jesus was resurrected and in His immortal body, He ate with His disciples and He still gave thanks for their food. 'When Jesus sat down at the table with them He took the bread and gave thanks. Breaking it, He gave to them. Their eyes were opened and they recognized Him then He vanished out of their sight' (Luke 24:30 & 31). 'Jesus asked, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. He took the food and ate in front of them' (Luke 24:41 to 43).

Amen and God bless you.

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