

sermon - Right Prayer - Matthew 6:5-13

5 “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Last week we talked about the spiritual discipline of the Word. This week our focus is on prayer. Stay tuned for next week to talk about Fellowship and Mission.

Today’s text is in the middle of what is called the sermon on the mount. This sermon Jesus gives here is directed at his disciples. It’s a lengthy message on what Jesus expects from the disciples in terms of attitude, behavior, and service, as they live in community with one another, and this stands in sharp contrast to the religious people of their day.

Chapter 6 begins a new section in the sermon on the Mount that focuses on religious practices, or disciplines that are to be common in the life of the believer. Matthew records three areas of discipline, giving, praying, and fasting. But at the outset Jesus gives this warning that couches the three disciplines. So let’s look back at the warning to help us see what’s going on here.

He says in 6:1 **“Beware** of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.” Then Jesus goes on to talk about each discipline with this theme running throughout.

There is a warning in the disciplines. This word “beware” cannot be taken strongly enough. It is critical. One commentator points out, *“Our Lord’s emphatic language intimates that what he warns them against is an evil of great magnitude, and an evil which they were in great hazard of incurring; an evil, to borrow the quaint language of Matthew Henry, that they were ‘in great danger by, and in danger of.’”*³¹²

Beware of what... practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them. That’s the big warning here.

The disciplines are an incredible means of grace for our lives, but we can’t think that when we do them, our flesh does not come with us. Like Paul says in Rom. 7 I find this law to be at work, that when I want to do good, evil is right there with me. Cause everywhere we go, our flesh goes too, this side of glory.” Jesus is saying, beware. Beware when you practice religion. So much in us is ready to love religion for the wrong reasons, to make us feel good or to be seen by others. But, Jesus is not saying stop, he’s saying do, keep on praying, keep on doing the disciplines, but do them with right motive. He’s not commanding prayer here, he is assuming you are praying and He’s commanding to pray with the right heart.

Have the right motive in prayer

5 “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

We see it here strongly in prayer. **V.5 “When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love** (there’s this heart component, love, so their satisfaction, pleasure, and hope is being aimed somewhere.) Okay where? **to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, why? that they may be seen by others.**

There it is, that's what they are aiming their hearts at. They want to be seen by others. It's about self-promotion, their reputation, and the praise of man.

But how does Jesus respond, He says, **“Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.”** You say, what reward? Exactly what they were searching for, they wanted to boost their reputation, feel good about themselves. Jesus says, they got that.

Then Jesus turns to the disciples, He's got another way for them to pray. He says, **“when you pray, go into room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”**

Jesus lays before the disciples this reward language. He's contrasting the reward of those who are seeking the blessing of man, with the reward of those seeking the blessing of God. This almost identical language is used for each section here, giving, praying, and fasting.

The pharisees had turned these very good things on their head and made them evil. Prayer had become about exaltation of man, not the exaltation of God. The synagogues and street corners were strategic places they could go to be seen praying. So Jesus is encouraging the disciples in the complete opposite direction. He says go be by yourself, and shut the door. The point is not that you have a prayer room, and have to go in there and shut the door every time you pray. Jesus prayed outside all the time. And the point is not that you have to always pray by yourself. Jesus prayed with people all the time. The point is, when you pray, you must pray with a heart that is seeking the glory of God.

But, there is something to be said for private prayer, it's almost like it is a strategic weapon against the flesh's desire to be seen. It takes that temptation away. And it seems Jesus command here to pray alone also becomes a measuring rod for us. A man's spirituality in his closet, when no one's looking and no one finds out. What does it say about a man's spiritual state if he prays often with people and he never prays alone.

But, just because you got alone and prayed, doesn't mean you don't still have the flesh to battle with, you can just as easily come away from isolated times with the Lord checking off the box in legalism, saying to yourself, wow, I'm awesome. And you just can't wait to tell someone about your prayer time. You ever felt that, you've spent time with God, you've prayed, read your Bible, or did a good deed to someone. You just have to tell someone. That happens to me all the time.

I'm not saying you don't talk to people about your prayer life or other acts of righteousness, I'm talking about that payoff that your flesh gets when you pray or when you tell someone that you prayed. It's sneaky and subtle, that's why Jesus says beware, it might not be obvious.

So what's your motive in prayer? When you pray is there something in you that takes pleasure in someone else hearing you.

For those of us that have trouble praying either alone or with others. What does it say about your relationship with God if you don't talk to Him. What would you think about my marriage if Ashley told you I never talked to her. Our relationship would be in trouble, right? God wants you to talk to Him. In fact He is eager to hear from you.

But maybe we pray alone, and never pray when we are with others. Now I know there's all kinds of reasons why we may not pray with others, I understand that, and that's okay, and some of those things take time to work through. But we must consider that silence in prayer may also be a sign of self glory. It's the reverse indicator of being a loud mouthed, long winded, prayer warrior. We don't pray because we are afraid of what someone else might think, which is concerning ourselves with our reputation, which when it boils down to it, is also the pursuit of our own glory. We aren't pursuing our glory in praying, we are trying to save our glory by not praying. Not always, I'm just saying it's something for us to consider.

Have the right basis for prayer

7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Here the focus has shifted from having the right motive, to what people are trusting in as their basis for being heard by God. You can feel how focused they are on themselves here, either they have a lot of pride that they can force God's hand in their own strength, or they are operating out of anxiety hoping that if they just say enough words God will hear them. Either way Jesus calls these empty words, words that don't have any power, no substance to them. The emptiness of their words is connected to how they think they will be heard.

At the core of this there is the belief that there is something man can do to get God to hear him. It's not long prayers Jesus is against, He prayed all night some times. It's thinking long prayers merit something, and that makes them vain. Why? Because they are prayed without faith. All prayers without faith are vain, praying in our own strength, treating prayer as a formula, a ritual, praying mindlessly, things like prayer beads, prayer flags, chanting, cutting, sacrificing, none of that gets anywhere with God. No amount of words or struggle or tears can merit God to listen to us. That would make God our debtor. God is no debtor to man. God listens to us because of He is gracious. Or, to put it this way, which is how the grace works itself out, don't think that you will be heard by God because of your performance, you are heard solely because of Christ's performance on your behalf.

This is how the writer of Hebrews puts it, **4:14, “Since then we have a high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, Let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”**

Jesus answers this in a strange way, He says, don't try to make God hear you, your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” He first draws their attention to the character of God, their Father, and that their Father already knows what they need.

To drive this point, and I love this, he says, “Your Father,” He doesn't say, your God. He says your Father. That's almost like I hear Jesus saying, let go of any anxiety or fear when you come to God in prayer. You are coming to your heavenly Father. You don't need to wonder if you are going to hear him. Not only is He sovereign and omniscient and knows what you are going to say before you say it, but He is well acquainted with all your needs before you even ask him. He knows the number of hairs on your head.

Believers get into the family of God, have God as their Father, as they are in Christ. In Christ, you are as accepted and heard by God in prayer today as you ever will be. It's on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection.

Matthew 7:11, If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Our basis for prayer is Christ. Jesus has secured our welcome and acceptance before God our heavenly Father.

Be encouraged this morning that you don't have to fear coming to God, you don't have to doubt if God hears you. He knows what you need before you even ask Him. You might say, well why then pray? Besides the fact that God has commanded you to pray, He has also ordained that His blessings come in response to prayer. On top of that, He just wants to spend time with you, and He wants you to spend time with Him. Remember, this is about a relationship here that we are cultivating.

But what if we still don't know what to pray for? Jesus tells us.

Have the right aim in prayer

9 Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Jesus here holds out to the disciples a pattern for praying. Do you have to pray these exact words every time you pray. No, that’s not the point. He’s trying to give us a framework, to give our prayers a certain focus, and certain variation, that is particularly good for our souls and this world, and is pleasing to God.

You might say, hold up, I thought we were supposed to just be free in prayer, this sounds like restraint, like law. I’m afraid of falling into mindless praying, won’t this restrict my freedom in prayer. That’s the same argument a lot of Jazz musicians use why they won’t study Classical. Jazz is prized for it’s freedom and heart, Classical for its structures and mind. But the best sound comes from those that have been trained in both disciplines. And they would tell you that the form releases their heart rather than restricting it. Give them a chord progression and they are freed up.

Yes, we are to be as free as we can when we talk to God. As you would talk to your dad, or to a best friend, or to a spouse, or to the president. All these are who God is on an infinitely greater scale. Revere and be free in His presence in prayer. What He wants is your heart, not a formula, that is true.

But the other truth we wrestle with is that our hearts shape our prayers and our prayers shape our hearts. What I care about I am going to pray for, and what I pray for I start caring more about. It’s like giving, where your treasure is there your heart is. And certain prayers are more or less like Christ. We don’t always fall into the most God-glorifying patterns of praying. James says we pray and do not get because we pray with wrong motives. Other places in Scripture we pray and do not get because we don’t pray according to the will of God.

So Jesus is not saying, drop your heart and stop being free in your prayer life. He is saying quite the opposite, let these structures serve to free you up in your prayer life. When we pray with the content that God wants us to pray with, it should free us to be more ourselves (cause we are praying according to our new nature), and more vibrant, and more earnest, and with greater intimacy with God.

So as we look at the Lord’s prayer, let’s keep that in mind. It’s a form for our hearts to follow to get in sync with God’s heart. We are going to look at a very simple way to understand the Lord’s prayer, from two different angles, which give us two applications in praying. The first is in its **variation**.

Notice the broad sweeps we have here in this prayer. There are six main petitions. After the initial address, “Our Father who is in heaven (which, as we have seen, is a loaded address), there is

Interestingly, the first three focus on God, “Your name, Your kingdom, Your will, ... and the second three focus on our needs, give us, forgive us, deliver us.” There is also the big, expansive, global, and the personal, daily.

1. hallowed be your name.

This is kind of a strange way to talk. It’s one of those things maybe we have said our whole lives but never really understood what it meant. It’s a prayer, not a statement. “May your Name be kept Holy.” (ISV). I have been helped immensely by John Piper here. When we pray hallowed be your name, we are praying, God, your Name be Holy, in me, and across the earth. But, it is more than mere holiness. Why? Because God’s holiness is unchanging, that’s the given, our prayers can’t change God’s holiness. so it’s that the holiness of God lands in our hearts, as those that see Him as holy. But, it goes even a step farther, because even the Devil believes in God’s holiness. So it is rather an esteeming of God’s holiness, a treasuring of, a worshiping of, honoring, glorifying, and taking joy in.

Hallowed be your name is to pray, may your name be worshiped, in me and across the earth.

2. Your kingdom come

This is a prayer that has an eye toward the second coming of Jesus. That’s when we believe the Kingdom of God will be fully manifested.

“The gospel is itself, above all, the announcement that God’s promised rule has now begun in and through the work of Jesus the Messiah...so the disciples are thus encouraged to pray that what was begun in the ministry of Jesus, what they have now begun to participate in, may be experienced in all its fullness.”

We are praying for God to once and for all, do away with darkness, it’s a longing for the day when Jesus will be enthroned over all the earth, in a new heavens and new earth.

3. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

This is a prayer for obedience to God’s law. That obedience would mark us. We don’t come to salvation through faith and grace and then downplay the moral law. No, God saves us and is creating in us Christlikeness, this is the process of sanctification. That more in more we would obey God.

Next, we move to focus on our needs.

4. Give us this day our daily bread. (daily bread)

This is a prayer for food. God I’m a physical creature and if you don’t provide for me I am going to die. How much have we lost this sense in our overstuffed all you can eat culture? This prayer could be for physical Health in general.

5. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. (daily mercy)

This is a prayer for hope. We have been forgiven in Christ, but yet we are always, this side of glory, still approaching the throne asking for forgiveness. And we are checking our hearts, forgiving others. This is not teaching that we must forgive in order to be forgiven, but that the evidence of our forgiveness by God is that we would forgive others. “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32).

And lastly,

6. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (daily protection)

We have had our past sins covered in grace, and now we are praying that we will not sin in the future. This is basically praying the promise from

“that we have no strength for living a holy life, except so far as we obtain it from God. Whoever implores the assistance of God to overcome temptations acknowledges that, unless God *deliver* him, he will be constantly falling.”³⁷⁷

1 Corinthians 10:13, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

This variation here in the Lord’s prayer covers all of life for us. God’s Name to be worshiped. He’s Kingdom to come. His will be done. Prayers daily for health, for mercy, and for protection. All our prayers can in some way or another fit up under one of these categories.

That’s the variation piece, but now I want to look at the **focus** piece. There is a certain way that these prayers relate to one another. It’s almost like there is one main prayer and 5 supporting prayers. The main prayer being the first, God be worshiped, exalted, treasured. And then the question is how? How does God begin to be treasured and worshiped in people’s hearts. And the answer is by answering the next five prayers. In other words, as God answers all the other prayers, this primary and central prayer of God being treasured in our hearts comes about.

And so what we want to see here is that the climax of all prayer, no matter what you are praying for is worship.

Here's how John Piper puts it.

"It is not wrong to want God's gifts and ask for them. Most prayers in the Bible are for the gifts of God. But ultimately every gift should be desired because it shows us and brings us more of Him. . . . When this world totally fails, the ground for joy remains. God. Therefore, surely every prayer for life and health and home and family and job and ministry in this world is secondary. And the great purpose of prayer is to ask that—in and through all His gifts—God would be our joy."

Is your prayer life aimed at getting and treasuring God? Is it rooted in a desire for His glory.

Prayer is not supposed to be a burden, it is to be a joy, but we must do prayer how God has commanded us, with the right motive, on the right basis, and with the right aim.

But in this too, we will fail, and our hope is not in our prayer life. Our hope is the one who perfectly prayed on our behalf, and who continues interceding for us at the right hand of God. In following His example, let us pray.

Let's pray.