

WHEN YOU PRAY: MATTHEW 6:5-15

INTRO.:

1. ILLUST.: One day a woman was rushing home from a doctor's appointment.
 - a. The doctor had been somewhat delayed at the hospital, and the lab work took a little longer than usual so by the time she left the clinic she was running quite a bit behind schedule.
 - b. She still had to pick up her prescription, pick up the children from the baby-sitter, and get home and make supper, all in time to make it to the Wednesday night Bible study at her church that evening.
 - c. As she began to circle the busy Wal-Mart parking lot, looking for a space, the windows of heaven were opened, as it says in Genesis, and a downpour began.
 - d. While she wasn't usually the type to bother God with small problems, she began to pray as she turned down the row closest to the front door.
 - 1) "Lord, you know what kind of a day I've had, and there's still an awful lot to do."
 - 2) "Could you please grant me a parking space right away, oh, and close to the building so I don't get soaked."
 - e. The words weren't even completely out of her mouth when she saw the backup lights of a car come on at the end of the row.
 - 1) It was the best space in the whole parking lot, right next to the handicap spots and straight out from the front door.
 - 2) She made straight for it and as she pulled in, she said, "Never mind God, something just opened up, sorry I bothered you."
2. This humorous story shows you how often we take the subject of prayer so lightly.
 - a. We often treat it as a fire-escape to get us out of a tight situation, rather than what it really is, going into the throne room of God and communicating one on one with the Creator of the universe.
 - b. Thus it is not by accident that as we continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount and "*the righteousness that exceeds,*" we find Jesus dealing with the subject of prayer.
 - 1) The entire sixth chapter of Matthew expounds upon the "*righteousness expected of those who are citizens of the kingdom.*"
 - 2) And starting in vs. 5 Christ will deal with how we are to put our righteousness into action with respect to our relationship with God.
 - 3) Remember that Matt. 6:1 provides the introductory statement concerning all acts of righteousness: "*Beware of practicing your righteousness before men, to be seen by them...*"
 - a) We have seen this principle applied to charitable deeds in vs. 2-4.
 - b) And today we will see Jesus applying it to the practice of "prayer."
3. Before we look at the text proper, let me interject one comment here.
 - a. In this passage Jesus is not condemning public prayer, or even dealing with public prayer (per se).
 - b. This is evident from the fact that Jesus Himself prayed in public (Matt. 11:25; Jn. 11:41); and the apostles prayed in public (Acts 27:35).
 - c. Rather what Jesus is dealing with here is the attitude with which we approach prayer, whether it is public or private.
 - d. In Matt. 6:5-15 He will contrast the outward righteousness which the Pharisees showed in their prayers, with the real righteousness that God requires of true citizens in His kingdom as they approach Him in prayer.
4. Matt. 6:5-8: (Read).
 - a. In this passage we find Jesus teaching us both on how to pray and how not to pray.
 - b. Notice that our text for today begins with the word, "*And when you pray.*"
 - c. This statement raises a number of questions:
 - 1) What should I do when I pray?
 - 2) What should I keep in mind when I pray?
 - 3) How should I begin and what should my prayers include?
 - 4) And what should be my attitude when I pray?
 - d. This AM let us look at what Christ taught here about prayer.

LESSON:

- I. First, notice what Jesus said we are NOT to do in prayer (vs. 5, 7).
- A. Jesus said, “*Do not be like the hypocrites.*”
1. What are they like?
 - a. They love to pray:
 - 1) Standing in the synagogues.
 - 2) Standing on the street corners.
 - 3) Or standing in any public place where men could see and hear them.
 - b. Further, we find that they love to pray long prayers.
 - 1) Prayers with a lot of words, and flowery speech.
 - 2) Prayers with many meaningless phrases, or repetitive words.
 - 3) Prayers where they have memorized the phrases and can say them without even thinking.
 - 4) Prayers where everyone who has heard them before can actually recite their prayer for them.
 - 5) Prayers that have not truly come from the heart.
 2. Why did they pray this way?
 - a. Their whole motive was so that they could “*be seen of men.*”
 - b. They did it because they were seeking the praise of men.
- B. What did Jesus say about this hypocritical type of prayer?
1. “*They have their reward.*”
 2. That is, they are being heard by men and will receive the praise of men for being, “So religious.”
 3. But, they have no reward, or blessing from God.
 4. Their prayers were not heard by God.
- II. How, then, does Jesus say the righteous are to pray, whether in public or private?
--Notice the 4 elements of acceptable prayer that Jesus mentioned here:
- A. 1st: It must be done “*to be seen by God,*” not men. (vs. 6).
1. This is the main idea behind the phrase “*praying in secret.*”
 2. The idea is to get alone with God and be able to speak to Him on an intimate basis.
 - a. The point is that there is little real communication with God that can occur in public.
 - b. There are so many things that will distract us if we do not make an effort to get alone with God.
 - c. In the busyness of our lives, real communication with the Father is often impossible unless there is privacy.
 - d. That is why Christ said if we want to communicate with our Father we must go into our room and shut the door.
 - e. The shut door symbolizes shutting the world out so that we can spend undivided time with God in prayer.
 3. There are several advantages to finding a secluded place where we can be alone with God:
 - a. It allows us to focusing on Him and Him alone.
 - b. It allows us to concentrate on His person, and get to know who He is.
 - c. It enables us to know that we are in His presence.
 - d. And it makes it possible for us to commit our every care of life to Him.
 4. Someone said, “The sincere and humble worshiper, one who is not interested in making a public display for the sake of enhancing his prestige, will find the secluded nook or den to be most appropriate for his devotions.”
 5. Simply, the person who spends much time in their secret closet of prayer is praying to be seen by God, not men.

- B. 2nd: It must be done “*to be heard by God,*” not men (vs. 7).
1. Our audience in our prayers is God and God alone.
 2. Since this is the case, we must realize:
 - a. God is not a reluctant listener and thus He does not have to be impressed with the quantity of our words.
 - b. God is not interested in fancy formulas or lofty speech with flowery words.
 - c. God is not somebody we can wear down with our many fancy words and flowery speech so that He finally gives in.
 - d. Rather, He is only interested in the expressions that come from a sincere heart.
 3. Simply, we must remember is that whether public, or private, our prayers are to God and not men.
 - a. It is an abuse of prayer to use it to teach a lesson to the hearers.
 - b. It is an abuse of prayer to use it to try to encourage the audience (people) to change.
 - c. It is an abuse of prayer to use meaningless phrases in an effort to try to impress those who hear us.
 - d. It is an abuse of prayer to repeat per-programmed, pre-memorized phrases that do not come from a sincere heart.
 - 1) Phrases like, “Guide, guard, and direct us,” “Heal the sick the world over,” “Bring us back at our next appointed time, etc.” are meaningless and an affront to God if they do not come from a sincere heart.
 - 2) ILLUST.:
 - a) I do not know how many time I have heard someone pray, “Bring us back at our next appointed time” when they know full well that they will not be back at the next appointed time (Sunday PM or Wednesday).
 - b) While such phrases may sound good, they are hypocritical and no different than the prayers of the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus condemned.
 4. NOTE: It is easy for us to fall into the habit of uttering meaningless phrases, even in our private prayers.
 - a. It is easy for us to fall into a ritual in our prayers, where we can say our prayers without even thinking.
 - b. Thus we need to listen to the advice of Paul in 1 Cor. 14:15: “*I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also.*”
 5. Why does Jesus say that many words, and repeated meaningless phrases are not needed?
 - a. “*Because your Father knows that you have need of all these things before you ask Him.*”
 - b. Prayers which are to be heard by God do not need to be filled with superfluous words as God already knows what we need.
 - c. The concern God has is not how we say it, but what is in the heart behind the words that is giving them voice.
 - d. An effective, heart-felt prayer is not measured by the sheer volume of words one uses, but rather by the sincerity of the heart.
 6. ILLUST.: Let me use an illustration that may help us to understand this point.
 - a. Our relationship with God is like a parent-child relationship.
 - b. As parents, don’t you often get tired of hearing you children ask, “Why? Why? Why?”
 - 1) Hearing the same thing over and over gets tiring.
 - 2) And after a while you find that even you child is not really interested in the answer.
 - c. Do you think God is any different?
 - d. God never tires of hearing about our love for Him, our sincere needs, etc.; but He does get tired of our just rambling off at the mouth with no real thought about what we are saying or asking.
 - e. Like children before a loving parent, we must open our hearts and make our requests.
 - 1) There is no need for us to try to sort things out, the good from the bad.
 - 2) We are simply to share our concerns and make our petitions.
 - a) We can tell God how frustrated we are with the co-worker at the office.
 - b) We can express to God our fears about an upcoming Dr.’s appointment or medical test.
 - c) We ask for food, favorable weather, and good health – Etc.
 7. Simple prayer involves ordinary people bringing ordinary concerns to a loving and compassionate Father who is ready and eager to listen to us and help us

- C. 3rd: Prayer needs to follow the pattern Jesus described in vs. 9-13: (Read).
1. The phrase, “*in this manner*” suggests that Jesus was here giving us a pattern for prayer.
 - a. In this passage Jesus did not give us some liturgical exercise we are to recite over and over, which some have called, “The Lord’s Prayer.”
 - b. This is not some formula that we are to repeat over and over – which is the very thing Jesus has just condemned.
 - c. Rather, He was giving us a pattern to follow if we truly want to approach God as righteous citizens in His kingdom and be heard.
 2. Let us notice the simple pattern He gave us for acceptable prayer:

--Notice 2 things here:

 - a. Its simplicity.
 - 1) The word “*therefore*” connects this verse with the previous where he talked about the many words of the Gentiles (and Jews) prayers.
 - 2) In reading this prayer, we quickly notice the brevity of words.
 - 3) It is a prayer that takes less than 30 seconds to pray.
 - b. Its content, or what acceptable prayer should included:
 - 1) 1st: Reverence for God and His name (vs. 9).
 - a) In these 66 words 24 are directed to who God is and 28 to what we need.
 - b) By giving this model, I think Jesus is suggesting that our ratio in prayer needs to be similar.
 - c) We need to spend time in prayer thinking about how “hollowed” or holy God’s name is.
 - i His name represents who He is.
 - ii All glory and honor are due to Him.
 - d) When we say “*Hollowed be thy name,*” we are saying up front, “I do not want any prayer answered that does not honor our holy name. Your glory is far more important to me than any personal comforts I may receive.”
 - 2) 2nd: Praying for the progress of God’s kingdom and for His will to be done on earth (vs. 10).
 - a) Prayer must never be used as an attempt to bend the will of God to our own personal desires.
 - b) Rather it is used to help us blend our will and desires into the will of God.
 - c) The phrase, “*kingdom of God*” has to deal with the ruler ship of the King.
 - d) Again we are saying up front, before we make any personal petitions, “I am committed to your will, Father, even if it runs counter to what I think I want you to do for me.”
 - e) It recognizes right up front God’s wisdom, sovereignty, and right to rule over everything, including my life.
 - 3) 3rd: Asking for our physical needs (vs. 11).
 - a) Notice the word “*daily*.”
 - b) To ask God for our “*daily needs*” means that we make prayer a part of our “*daily*” lives.
 - c) It means that we live in the here and now, and not in the past or future.
 - 4) 4th: Praying about our spiritual needs:
 - a) Forgiveness of sins (vs. 12).
 - b) Protection from and deliverance from Satan and his followers (vs. 13a).
 - 5) 5th: Praising God (vs. 13b).
 - c. In just a few verses Jesus has given us a beautiful pattern to follow.
 - 1) Fill in a few names and add some personal needs and you have an acceptable prayer to God.
 - 2) In all of our ingenuity we could not improve on the simple pattern Jesus gave here.
 - 3) This is something that even the smallest child who had learned to speak can do.
- D. 4th: It must be offered with a merciful, forgiving spirit: vs. 14-15: (Read).
1. **NOTE**: This must be a very important point, as it is the only part of the pattern prayer that Jesus elaborated on.
 2. Simply, if we are unwilling to be merciful and forgiving of others, we cannot expect God to be to us (Matt. 18:21-25; Ja. 2:13).

CONC.:

1. The privilege of prayer is one of the most important blessings to be enjoyed by the children of God in this life.
 - a. To know that I can stop anytime of the day, anywhere and God will hear and listen is truly a blessing.
 - b. To know that the Creator of the Universe wants to listen to me and will let me come into His presence anytime is awesome.
 - c. And to know that I do not have to use fancy words or lofty phrases to impress Him or get Him to listen to me, is comforting.

2. I want to close with a story regarding early African converts to Christianity.
 - a. They were earnest and regular in private prayer times and devotions.
 - b. Each one, seeking that quiet place Jesus mentioned, reportedly had a spot in the thicket where he would pour out his heart to God.
 - c. Over time, these paths to the quiet places became well worn.
 - d. As a result, if one of these believers began to neglect prayer, it was soon apparent to others.
 - e. They would kindly remind the negligent one, "Brother, the grass grows on your path."
 - f. I ask you this morning, "Does the grass grow on your path to your quiet place?"

3. The point Jesus was making is that continuous prayer is really important to the life of every disciple.
 - a. As we strive to put our righteousness into practice on a daily basis, prayer must be a part of that.
 - b. God is concerned about how we pray, and He is concerned that our righteousness in prayer exceeds the practice of the scribes and Pharisees who were just going through the motions, or mechanics; but never really spoke to Him.

4. God wants to and longs to have a personal relationship with you, but it all begins with you.
 - a. Is God truly your father, and have you become His child?
 - b. Are you a Christian? Have you been born into His family?
 - c. If not, then the privileges and blessings found in prayer are not available to you.
 - d. Why not become a child of God today, by being born again