

# The Sermon on the Mount

## Prayer (Matthew 6:5-15)

### INTRODUCTION:

- I. In our series of studies on The Sermon on the Mount, we've been examining the teachings of Jesus that Matthew calls "the gospel of the kingdom."
  - A. Matthew 4:23 - *"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom..."*
    1. These are eternal truths – or fundamental principles – that God desired for all mankind to live by for all time.
    2. These timeless eternal truths deal with our having a proper relationship with each other as well as having a proper relationship with God.
    3. In fact, throughout The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is dealing with the attitude of our hearts.
      - a. In chapter 5 the Lord addressed the attitude of our heart toward the way we treat others.

- b. And now, in chapter 6 Jesus addresses the attitude of our heart toward the acts of righteousness we perform to honor and glorify God.
- B. Unfortunately, for some in the days of Jesus, glorifying God wasn't their main concern.
  - 1. Some were more concerned about glorifying themselves in the eyes of others.
  - 2. The scribes and Pharisees – the religious leaders of the Jewish people in the days of Jesus – were notorious for performing religious acts be NOTICED by others, to be held in HIGH ESTEEM by others, to be PRAISED and REVERED by others.
    - a. They sought the praise and adoration of others more than they sought the praise of God.
  - 3. We saw how the scribes and Pharisees – hypocrites, as Jesus called them – gave alms to the poor in ways that were specifically designed to draw attention to themselves.
  - 4. And now, as we continue with our study of Matthew chapter 6, we're going to see how these same hypocrites drew attention to themselves during prayer.
- C. So let's begin by reading the text together and then see what lessons we can draw from all this.

1. **Matthew 6:5-13** – *"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. 7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. 9 In this manner, therefore, pray: 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 forgive our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."*
2. And then, Jesus added this caveat: **Matthew 6:14-15** – *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*

**BODY:**

I. To begin our study, let's first consider what we should NOT do in regards to prayer.

A. Jesus said, do NOT be like the hypocrites.

1. **Matthew 6:5** – *"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward."*

B. These were men who loved to pray. But it wasn't their praying that Jesus condemned here, it was the PLACES they selected to pray, their POSTURE when they prayed in these places, and the PURPOSE for praying in the manner they were doing.

1. The PLACES they chose to pray were in the synagogues and on the street corners.
  - a. Synagogues were places of public worship during the days of Jesus, just as they are for Jewish people today. So there was certainly nothing wrong with praying in the synagogue – praying in the synagogue was as common to them as praying in this church building is to us.
  - b. The street corners were where two streets converged, and so would be a place where you would find a lot of visible traffic.

But there is nothing inherently wrong with praying where two streets intersect – we can pray anywhere.

2. But when we begin adding the second element – their POSTURE when praying – we begin to get a little clearer picture of what Jesus was condemning.
  - a. Rather than assume a posture of humility such as bowing or kneeling, they stood.
  - b. Praying while standing was not the issue. We can assume any posture to pray – standing, sitting, kneeling, or even doing as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying while laying face down.
  - c. However, the fact that they specifically chose to STAND suggests something about their PURPOSE for praying while standing in the synagogues and on the street corners.
3. So, when we add the third element – their PURPOSE for praying in the manner in which they prayed – we get a clear picture of why Jesus condemned their practice.
  - a. Jesus said their PURPOSE for praying while standing in the synagogue and on the street corners was "*that they may be seen by men*". **(Matthew 6:5b)**

4. Therefore, the issue was not WHERE they were praying, or HOW they were praying as much as it was WHY they were praying.
  - a. Their whole purpose was not to glorify God, but to glorify themselves.
  - b. They weren't praying to seek the attention of God they were praying to seek the attention of the masses.
- C. And so, Jesus said, *"Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward"*.  
**(Matthew 6:5)**
  1. This is just another way of saying these hypocrites got exactly what they were seeking – the reward of being noticed by others.
    - a. The common people looked upon these men praying these beautiful prayers while standing in the synagogues and on the street corners as HOLY and GODLY men – men of deep religious and moral conviction.
    - b. But Jesus said they were hypocrites.
  2. They weren't praying to seek the reward of HEAVEN, they were praying to seek the reward of being praised and revered by the people.
  3. And so, that's the ONLY reward they got!
- D. Now, does this mean Jesus is condemning PUBLIC prayer? Not at all.

1. The scriptures are filled with examples of public prayer – including examples of JESUS praying in public.
    - a. In the midst of PUBLICLY rebuking the cities where He had performed miracles and was still being rejected, Jesus stopped to pray. **(Matthew 11:25f)**
    - b. When Jesus was among those who were grieving over the death of Lazarus, Jesus prayed publicly. **(John 11:41-42)**
    - c. Even while on the cross, Jesus prayed. **(Luke 23:34)**
  2. We also have the example of the apostle Paul. When he was in the midst of a terrible storm, surrounded by others on board a ship bound for Rome, Paul paused to break bread and to give thanks to God before them all. **(Acts 27:35)**
  3. It wasn't PUBLIC PRAYER that Jesus condemned, it was the PURPOSE for praying in public – namely to draw attention to oneself.
- II. So, how SHOULD we pray? Jesus gives us three guidelines here on how we should pray.
- A. First, Jesus says we should pray to be seen by GOD, not by men.
    1. **Matthew 6:6** – *"But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the*

*secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."*

2. This is the main idea being "*praying in the secret place*".
    - a. Some have taken this to mean we need to literally pray privately behind closed doors – in a secret place.
  3. However, once again, Jesus was using a metaphor to say our praying should never be to draw attention to ourselves, but rather in a place where we can meet privately with God.
    - a. This not only suggests having a PLACE where we can be alone with God in prayer, but suggests the need to BE ALONE with God in prayer.
    - b. While public prayers serve a specific purpose, private prayer draws us even closer to God in a very intimate way.
  4. And the benefit is that God, who SEES in secret – whose penetrating vision can pierce the very hidden depths of our heart – will reward us openly.
- B. In addition to our prayers being SEEN by God, our prayers should be for the purpose of being HEARD by God, and not men.
1. **Matthew 6:7-8** – "*And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many*

*words. 8 Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him".*

2. It was a common practice among the heathen religions of the Gentile world to chant words and phrases over and over – seemingly endless repetitious chanting. The purpose was twofold:
  - a. One, it was possible to work oneself up into a frenzy by rapidly chanting these words and phrases over and over – almost into some state of euphoria.
  - b. And two, it was believed that the pagan gods had to be persuaded to act – so the worshippers would repeat their chants and prayers over and over until they were convinced their pagan gods would hear and respond.
3. Jesus said there's no need for these vain, repetitious chants because, *"the Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him". (v. 8)*
  - a. The fact that our Father in heaven knows the things we need even before we ask tells us a couple things about approaching God in prayer.
    - (1). First, He doesn't need to be persuaded. He already knows our needs and is ready to respond to our needs when we ask.

(2). Second, praying with constant repetition as in heathen prayers shows a lack of faith on our part. We don't feel we can simply bring a matter before the Lord and leave it there for the Lord to answer in His way and in His time.

4. So, empty repetitious chants in prayers serves no purpose at all – except to show a lack of faith in God and in His love and concern for us.

III. But there's one final aspect to our prayers that Jesus wanted His disciples to understand.

A. Our prayers need to follow a pattern, but not a prescribed script.

1. **Matthew 6:9-13** – *"In this manner, therefore, pray: 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 forgive our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen".*
2. When Jesus said to pray *In this manner,*" He was speaking about a basic pattern for prayers. In other words, Jesus gave an example of the elements that can be included in our prayers.

- a. A lot of people think this is the Lord's Prayer – meaning they believe this is an actual prayer of Jesus.
- b. It's not. It is simply a PATTERN for our own prayers.

B. So, what is the PATTERN?

1. First, prayers must be SIMPLE.
  - a. Notice the word "*therefore*" – this word always connects what follows with what was said before
  - b. Jesus' pattern for prayer here is a simple "illustration" in contrast to the "*many words*" used by the heathen.
  - c. Notice the brevity of words – this prayer is short and simple.
2. Second, we need to be aware of the proper CONTENT.
  - a. A proper prayer includes...
    - (1). Reverence for God and His "name" – that is, His Being and character. **(v. 9)**
    - (2). Praying for the progress of God's Kingdom and His will on the earth. **(v. 10)**
    - (3). Asking for physical necessities. **(v. 11)**
    - (4) Also, asking for our spiritual needs, including:
      - (a). Forgiveness of sins. **(v. 12)**
      - (b). And, protection and deliverance from evil. **(v. 13)**
    - (5) And finally, a prayer that ends with praising God. **(v. 13)**

IV. However, Jesus added one caveat to this lesson prayer.

A. Jesus said our prayers must originate from a compassionate, forgiving spirit.

1. **Matthew 6:14-15** – *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses".*
2. If we're going to pray for God to forgive us our trespasses – our sins – then we need to be ready and willing to do the same toward others.
  - a. There is a simple reason why our prayers must be offered with a merciful, forgiving spirit toward others.
  - b. Unless WE show mercy and forgiveness toward others, we cannot expect mercy and forgiveness from God.
3. **Matthew 18:21-35** – *Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. 23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand*

talents. 25 But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. 26 The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' 27 Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. 28 "But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' 29 So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' 30 And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. 31 So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. 32 Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' 34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. 35 "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

- B. So, just how important is it for us to forgive others if we expect our prayers for forgiveness to be answered?
  - 1. Let me answer it this way – this one aspect of prayer must have been VERY important in the mind of Jesus, because this is the ONLY part of the pattern prayer upon which He elaborated!
  - 2. So how important do YOU think forgiving others is if we want to be forgiven?

**CONCLUSION:**

- I. Prayer is such an important part of our lives as Christians – and it was certainly an important part of the life of Jesus.
  - A. We see Jesus praying constantly – not to mention the fact that He saw a need to preach on the subject in The Sermon on the Mount.
    - 1. Prayer is not only a great privilege it's one of the most important blessings we can enjoy as a child of God.
    - 2. And so, rather than simply rush over what the Lord had to say about prayer here, we're going to take some time to look at this pattern for prayer more closely in the coming weeks.
    - 3. In some respects, this portion of our series of lesson on the Sermon on the Mount will parallel some of the things we learned about

prayer in a series I preached two years ago entitled Lord Teach Us To Pray.

- B. But for now, let me ask this: How important is prayer in your life?
1. How often do you pray?
    - a. I'm not talking about during worship services, or before a meal.
    - b. I'm talking about how often do you find a secluded place where you can spend time alone with God in prayer?
    - c. I can't imagine the faithful Christian going through a single day without prayer – perhaps many prayers.
  2. But more than the QUANTITY of your prayers – or the NUMBER of your prayers – what about the QUALITY of your prayers?
    - a. How often do you truly open your heart and truly commune with God as your Father in heaven?
    - b. Do you just pray when things aren't going well, and then forget to pray when everything seems to be going great?
    - c. Or is quiet time alone with God – a period of INTENSE FELLOWSHIP with God – a part of your life every day?
- C. It's really impossible to have that INTENSE FELLOWSHIP with God if we're not one of His children.
1. If you've never come to Christ in complete faith and obedience, and have never been baptized for the remission of your sins, then you've

never been added by the Lord to His church – His spiritual kingdom  
– and you don't truly have fellowship with God or with Jesus Christ.

2. And if you've neglected your relationship with God and with Jesus Christ as a Christian, and you seem more interested in spending all your time fellowshiping the world and the things of the world, then you no longer have that close intimate fellowship with God that you once had.
3. But all that can change today...