

Jesus Teaching (18)
Sermon on the Mount (17)
Proper Prayer (Matthew 6:5-8)

Today we continue our theme for 2020/21, the teachings of Jesus. We are continuing our examination of the Sermon on the Mount. There are so many great lessons even for us in this sermon. Jesus is emphasizing a righteousness that is pleasing to God, as opposed to flowery speech and conduct designed only to impress men and justify what you want to do. We are in the midst of a portion of this sermon where Jesus is addressing actions for self-gratification and how our righteousness is beyond that. In our last lesson we talked about proper giving. In this lesson we will begin addressing proper prayer. We will present this in 2 lessons – 1 about how to pray according to our text, and 2) one about the model prayer that Jesus gave in this text.

I. When you pray –

- a. ***We need to be praying.*** Praying has always been important to God. It is how we communicate to Him. You can find prayers with the patriarchs, the priests, the children of Israel, and as an integral part of the Christian's life.
- b. ***Jesus set the example by praying often*** – the gospel of Luke gives great emphasis on this. We find Him praying in the morning (Mark 1:35), in the evening (Matthew 14:23) and at times all night (Luke 6:12). He prayed privately (Mark 1:35) and publicly. His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1)
- c. ***We are told to pray often*** – 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 4:2 – “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving, Romans 12:12, continuing steadfastly in prayer, etc.
- d. ***Any Christian who desires to grow needs prayer in his life on a very regular basis*** – remember the saying, “Seven days without prayer makes one WEAK”
- e. ***But how do we pray?*** It is an extensive study to consider all that scripture teaches on this. One who learns to pray properly can devote considerable time to it and will never run out of things to pray for. IF you want to grow as a Christian, prayer is an ABSOLUTE MUST! (BTW, so is Bible study).

II. Do NOT be like the hypocrites

- a. ***The Bible has much to say about how to pray and how NOT to pray.*** IT is possible for our prayers to NOT be heard (cf. John 9:31, James 4:3, 1 Peter 3:7, James 1:6-8, etc.) Jesus addressed a few things in our text.
- b. ***Hypocrites*** – those pretending (the word is a transliteration of the Greek word to describe a stage actor – on playing a part). There are many who are simply not sincere in what they do – they are hiding their real motives, pretending to be something they are not or just putting on a front for the sake of those who see them.
- c. ***Making a show*** – Jesus described these as loving to pray standing in the synagogue and on street corners. It was customary of many Jews to pray 3 times a day (the Bible gives set times when they did pray - Acts 3:1).
Some would pray drawing attention to themselves – at the time of prayer they would stop, face Jerusalem (the temple) and pray – many would make gestures (such as raising their hands in the air), perhaps they would loudly utter their prayers, and do other things to show just how “pious” they really were.
Many might see this and think, “That man is so godly”. I read a preacher staying in a home for a

gospel meeting when the host told a friend, “He is such a man of prayer. Every time I walk by his room I find him on his knees praying.” The friend then asked, “If he is such a man of prayer, why didn’t he shut the door?” More on this in a moment.¹

- d. **Flowery, but meaningless or superficial speech** – there are some who know how to pray beautiful prayers and they mean it. Others utter prayers that are long, filled with intellectual words that are not understood by the average man, and even boastful sayings. It becomes clear they love pray publicly and let others know how wonderful they are.
NOTE: Long prayers not wrong, nor are intellectual utterances – but for some its how they draw attention to themselves.
- e. **Using vain repetition** – more on this in a moment.
- f. **“They have their reward”** - Just as with giving to be seen of men, Jesus noted that God knows the heart and the ONLY acknowledgment such will receive is from those who hear them. GOD IS NOT IMPRESSED!

III. **Pray privately**

- a. **It is NOT wrong to pray publicly** – Jesus prayed publicly. Public prayers were a part of worship. It is something done when we come together (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:15).
This is about motive and TRUE righteousness.
- b. **In your closet** – secretly. You find a place AND TIME when it is just you and God. In such a place, you are lying to no one. You can humbly and sincerely open your heart and pour out your concerns to Him. You can confess your sins to Him (1 John 1:9). You ask for His help. You praise and thank Him.
- c. **God knows your heart** – something we are continually reminded of! Acts 15:8, Romans 8:27, etc. He knows your real motives, your feelings, your attitude and even your actions. He knows if you are being a hypocrite. He even knows what you mean if you don’t know how to put it into words (Romans 8:26).
- d. **Pray humbly** - while not directly mentioned in this text, it is clearly what God wants. An example of a humble and sincere prayer is found in Luke 18:13, where the tax collector would not even look up and said, “*God, be merciful to me a sinner.*”
- e. NOTE: It is your “closet” where your longer prayers (and they don’t always have to be) are uttered as you have so many things to pray for (More on this next week).

IV. Do not use vain repetition

- a. **NOTE this does NOT say repetition is wrong.** In fact, it is needed at times.
Jesus prayed 3 times in the garden that His cup would pass from Him. One source noted that after Jesus came to His disciples the first time He said, “What! Could you not watch with Me one hour?” (Matthew 26:40) which at least implies that His was long prayer on this occasion. What is recorded is His simple request – “Let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done.” (cf. Matthew 26:39)
2 Corinthians 12:8, Paul pleaded with the Lord 3 times concerning his thorn in the flesh.
Acts 9:11 we find that Paul has been fasting and praying now for 3 days (9:9).
Jesus also in teaching about prayer gave 2 parables (Luke 11:1ff – where His disciples ask Him to teach them how to pray and He responds with the prayer of a persistent friend [11:5-10]; and Luke 18:1-8 where Jesus said, “men ought to always pray and not lose heart”. This was followed by the parable of the persistent widow.)
How long should we pray for something? There is no set time. You pray until it is answered (NOTE: Not necessarily the way you want it answered).

¹ Adams, Wilson, “The Sermon on the Mount, Vol. 1”, *Courageous Living Books* , © 2011. Pg. 43

b. **What is vain repetition?** The word “vain” means empty or meaningless. Consider our studies in Ecclesiastes where Solomon said, “All is vanity” over and over. It means you are repeating things without putting any thought into it. Catholicism, and many denominations are known for ritualistically citing the Lord’s prayer. It is possible that such can become vain as you have said it so many times you don’t even think about what you are saying. Catholic priests as penance can tell you to say the Lord’s prayer and the “Hail Mary prayer” a certain number of times. One might “count beads” as he/she does this to make sure they complete the number of times. This is an example of repetition that can become vain – your counting how many times you utter something.

NOTE: In our prayers, if we repeat the same prayer over and over, it CAN become vain repetition. IT is not the fact that we repeat a phrase, but when we are not thinking about it as we do!

c. **As the heathen (Gentiles) do** – history records the prayers of pagans were judged based upon length rather than substance. Many pagans believed that ritualistic prayers could manipulate the gods to favor them. They would develop lists of long names and chant them endlessly. For example: Acts 19:34 where for 2 hours they chanted, “Great is the goddess Diana” and 1 Kings 18:26 where we read, the prophets of Baal “called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon saying, ‘O Baal, hear us!’” They also leapt about the alter they had made. These are some examples.

V. **God knows your need (8)**

- a. Our final observation in this lesson – Jesus notes that **God is fully aware of everything we need, even before we pray for it.**
- b. So why do we pray?
 - i. Because He said to!
 - ii. It keeps us mindful of our needs and hopefully we will do our part to accomplish those needs, while trusting Him to do what we cannot do.
 - iii. It reminds us of who He is and that we need Him. 1 Peter 5:7 – cast all your prayers on Him. Hebrews 4:16 calls for us to come boldly to the throne of His grace that we may find help in time of need.

And thus we find some admonitions of Jesus as we pray to God with true righteousness. Let us ensure that our prayers to God are offered sincerely, humbly and regularly. God really deserves no less. Next week we will discuss what to pray for. Meanwhile, HOW is your prayer life? Think about it!