

Sermon Notes
WORSHIP SERVICE - 1.21.2024
WHEN YOU PRAY

I. INTRODUCTION

Matthew 6:5-15

“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.

14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

II. PRAY LIKE THIS NOT LIKE THAT

- 6:1, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them...”
- This is at the heart of what Jesus critiques about the religious leaders and the religious system of his day.
- The problem was the age-old problem of hypocrisy.
- Those praying in public had the appearance of righteousness, but it was all a show.
- Their motives were not pure, they were man-centered.
- Their aim was not at pleasing God but pleasing man, they wanted to be seen by men.

1. WHEN YOU PRAY: CHECK YOUR MOTIVES

- “When you pray...” that’s the expectation.
- Jesus shows us not only how to pray, but how NOT to pray.
- Prayer must be approached with the right motives—to please God.
- Jesus is going straight at the corrupt motivations of the religious leaders that accompanied their public displays of self-righteousness.
- Pious Jews would stop to pray at the three appointed times of prayer throughout the day, 9am, noon, and 3pm.
- Some would pray in public and do it in a way where they were not calling attention to themselves.
- But others would make a pretentious display of their prayer, stopping in the street corner and praying in a loud voice, with arms outstretched, in order to be seen by others.

- What he is saying is that if your motivations of praying in public are to be noticed by others, you had better enjoy the moment, because there is no eternal reward in what you are doing.
- The way the religious leaders prayed was in order to boost their reputations.
- They were performing for a human audience, desiring the praises of men.
- The issue Jesus is getting at is the temptation that accompanies public prayer.
- We have a propensity to twist our motives for prayer when we pray publicly that we must avoid.
- We are too easily flattered and we like to have our ego stroked.
- We want others to notice our spiritual discipline.
- If any of our motives for praying are twisted, and we are praying in front of others, we then process the wording of our prayer so as to generate a response from others.
- When we do that we have shifted from pleasing God to pleasing man.
- That is hypocritical. Feigning devotion to God when your true aim is to be seen by men.
- The hypocrite, gets their reward in full, right here and now.

a. PRAY IN SECRET

- Jesus presents an alternative solution to keep us from being tempted by public prayer.
- Jesus says, when you pray, go to your room and shut the door, because your audience is “your Father who is in secret” who sees you and rewards you.
- Why in secret?
- So you will not be corrupted by the impure motives of the hypocrites.
- If your aim in prayer is pleasing God, you won’t be tempted to put on a religious show for worldly rewards.
- We pray in secret to honor God.
- We don’t have to announce to others that we’re going to pray, we don’t have to tell others how often we pray or for how long we pray.

b. PRAY TO YOUR FATHER

- Here is the goal of secret prayer, shutting out all other distractions and removing the temptations of public prayer, it’s to go before your heavenly Father, to pray to the audience of one.
- Jesus, says, when that’s your motivation, to seek Him, the Father who is there with you, sees you and rewards you.
- Psalm 27:8 You have said, “Seek my face.” My heart says to you, “Your face, Lord, do I seek.”
- Jeremiah 29:13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.
- James 4:8a Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.
- Here’s the promise we have from Scripture, God will not withhold himself from those who seek him.
- Enter into prayer with a heart that longs for God and his presence.
- How does the Father reward you?
- 1. He rewards you with himself.
- We always think of reward as something and not someone.
- To enjoy the sweet fellowship and presence of God and delight in him is the greatest reward we could have.
- Psalm 65:4 Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts!
- In his presence we find fullness of joy and at his right hand or pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16:11).
- 2. He rewards you with answered prayer.
- The way the hypocrites prayed ensured that their prayers would never be answered.
- But when we offer sincere prayer, in faith, in the name of Jesus, with an aim for God’s glory, God hears those prayers and answers them.
- Jesus himself said, “ask me anything, in my name, and I will do it.” (John 14:13-14)
- 3. He rewards you with a changed heart that is more aligned with his.
- Prayer doesn’t only change circumstances and things, prayer changes us!
- Thankfully, we have the Word of God and the Spirit of God that work in us to conform our will and our heart to his.

- That's why Jesus said, abide in me and my words abide in you and then you can ask anything in my name and I will do it. (John 15:7)
- We can seek our Father and commune with him in prayer and request things of him in prayer, wherever and whenever.
- What matters is the motives of your heart when you pray.
- What a glorious privilege we've been given to pray to our Father who is in secret, trusting that He sees and hears us, and that He will reward us.

2. WHEN YOU PRAY: CHECK YOUR METHODS

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.

- When you pray you should not only check your motives, you should also check your methods.
- The Gentiles were all of the non-Jewish people. They were not praying to the God of Israel, they did not know him.
- And when the pagans pray to the gods, they heap up empty phrases.
- CSB don't babble like the Gentiles
- NKJV do not use vain repetitions like the heathens do
- "Heap up empty phrases" - Gk. βατταλογέω (battalogeō), means to stammer, to use the same words over and over again, to utter many useless and purposeless words.
- The pagans would mindlessly repeat chants, or mantras, over and over again, repeating sounds when they prayed.
- Not only did they mindlessly repeat meaningless phrases, they also used many words.
- Jesus said they think they are being heard because of their many words.
- The thought process is that if I use a lot of words and I repeat the same things over and over again, the gods must hear me and grant my request.
- 1 Kings 18 Elijah vs the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel.
- Acts 19, the worshippers of Artemis.
- How distinct this is from the approach to prayer that Jesus teaches us.
- We do not pray to some impersonal god who has to be coerced or pestered through the repetition of empty phrases in order for them to do our bidding and our will.
- We are praying to the sovereign God of the universe who is also our Father.
- We are praying to our Father who knows what we need and who cares for us.
- What Jesus is prohibiting is something we all need to be aware of so that we don't fall into the same error concerning our methods of praying.
 - a. We do not pray to inform God.
 - Jesus makes it clear, our Father knows what we need even before we ask.
 - When you present your request to God, do you pray as if you are informing him of something that he does not already know?
 - b. We do not pray to persuade God.
 - The pagans pray thinking that they have to twist god's arm. That he is reluctant to entertain their prayers or grant their requests.
 - Do you feel that way when you pray to your Father, that he must be pestered, and that you must frequently repeat things to him, in the hopes that your incessant requests will finally be met with an answer?
 - c. We do not pray to manipulate God.
 - The pagan's view their words or phrases as having some kind of magical power.
 - Do you use the phrase, "in Jesus's name," like some magic formula that makes God respond to your requests?
 - d. We do not pray to obligate God.
 - In the pagan's view of prayer, the repetition of phrases and the use of many words are seen as a meritorious work. If they do them enough, their god is obligated to answer.
 - Do you view prayer this way? If I pray enough, if I spend enough time in prayer, or if I pray long enough, using the right words and the right number of words, over and over again, God has to answer me?
- The truth is sometimes we view prayer like the pagans.
- We frantically repeat requests because we don't want God to forget about us.

- We seek to persuade him because we don't honestly view him as a loving Father who cares for us.
- Sometimes we pray because we feel God has to answer our request because of the amount of time we have put into praying.
- God cannot be obligated by words, phrases, or by our using prayer to merit some response from him.
- Jesus is saying to us, don't pray like that!
- Why not? Because our God is not like the gods of the pagans.
- He is not an impersonal force, he is not some cosmic power to bend to our will, he is a Father!
- Jesus says, your Father knows. He's fully aware. He lovingly cares.
- Before you even utter your request, He already knows what you need.
- How then should we pray when we pray?
- Because our Father knows what we need before we even ask, we pray to our Father expressing our complete dependence upon him.
- Presenting our needs to God is praying out of our conviction that we are dependent upon God for those very things that we are seeking him for.
- He is the God who supplies all of our needs.
- Because our Father knows what we need before we even ask, we pray in faith casting our cares upon our Father.
- Prayer is an act of faith. We believe God is willing to hear our prayer and grant the things that we request so we go to him with our needs.
- We're not informing someone who is forgetful, we're not trying to persuade someone who is reluctant to grant a request, we are not obligating an uncaring deity who is keeping score, and we are not trying to manipulate some impersonal force.
- Martin Luther, *"Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness."*
- When we pray we are pouring our hearts out to our loving and caring Father.
- And he promises to answer when we pray in this fashion, like a child to a Father.
- Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, *"There is an easy answer in the very purpose of prayer. The faithful do not pray to tell God what he does not know, or urge him to his duties, or hurry him on when he delays. Rather they pray to alert themselves to seek him, to exercise their faith by meditating upon his promise and unburdening their cares by lifting themselves into his bosom. Finally, they pray to testify that from him alone, all good for themselves and for others is hoped for and asked."* (1:204)
- This is the whole emphasis of Jesus's teaching on Prayer.
- We are praying to our Father!
- A Father who delights in hearing from his children.
- Speak to him from the heart. Share with him all of your concerns. Lay your burdens upon him for he cares for you.
- Pray with a heart to please, honor, and glorify Him.
- Pray with confidence that he hears you and he will answer you.
- Pray with as much fervor, length, and intensity as is necessary until you emerge from the secret place of prayer, fully convinced that He knows, hears, and cares.
- Because he is your Father.

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?