

## Practical Lesson on Prayer

### *Matthew 6:5-8*

#### *Introductory Note:*

- This portion of Jesus' sermon is directed toward making sure that certain aspects of our spiritual lives remain free from hypocrisy:
- Chapter Six begins with the exhortation to "*Beware practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your father who is in heaven*"
- Jesus first makes application in this regard to the practice of relieving the poor and needy, and will transition later on in the chapter to apply it to Fasting;
- In the middle of those two applications though is a fairly long instruction on what we should learn to avoid in praying, as well as lessons in how we should pray.

#### **Verses 5-6**

- **All throughout His** sermon Jesus has been giving us an image of what our service to God is to look like:
  - It is a service that is to be free from selfish motives and free of any deception: It is entirely focused on performing the Lord's will for the Lord's purposes:
  - To make that point Jesus, as He will do in other places, contrasts what our actions are to be with the actions of hypocrites: (*it is not the Pharisees that are singled out here, but anyone whose religion is not God focused*)
- **One of the points in verse 5** has to do with one of the basic building blocks of effective prayer: when we pray; it is supposed to be a something *special and unique*: It is a conversation between our Souls, and the Creator of the Universe:
  - It is a time when our desires are made known to God; when we are opening our heart:
  - **So one of the** dangers exposed in verse 5 is that we enter into prayer, and instead of addressing God, what we are really doing speaking for the benefit of others to hear:
  - ***Imagine that you were a person of some importance: How would you feel if someone came up to engage you in conversation, but instead of actually having a meaningful discussion face to face, they spend the time looking around, speaking loudly, and trying to call attention to the fact that they are speaking with you.***

- Its similar to what politicians do on the campaign trail: You don't really like it; and you end up feeling used!
- Think about the consequences of doing something so Trite with someone so important as Jehovah! This is a spiritual disaster!
  - One of the worst aspects of their offense is the way that they were **using God**:
  - They had not abandoned Him or ignored Him like their forefathers did; in fact, they ***loved to pray! They wanted to pray all the time!*** But the purpose of their religion was the advancement of self:
  - **It may be here that we have** the most application for ourselves today: We may not struggle with the same practice as is being outlined here in vs 5; but the heart of their issue will always be around, and will take many forms:
  - Whether it is in our **Prayer** or in any other aspect of our service to God, we should be determined to keep the focus on Him.
    - **One other word about verse 5:**
      - Jesus is not forbidding praying in public places: The problem with groups like the Pharisees and Saducees was not that they were seen praying, but rather that they wanted to be seen praying:
      - They loved themselves to much, they thought the world deserved to know how wonderful they were!
      - That they wanted to make arrangements to put their religion on display: **It has been suggested** by some that this involved being in the right place at the right time: **Passages such as Acts 3:1** make mention of specific *hours of prayer*;
      - And so these people might linger or make haste to find themselves on a street corner or highly visible place in order to get "caught" there during a time of prayer:
      - **Again, while we may not have an exact** situation like this today, we still live in a time that is very much "me focused". We would do well when using different forms of social media like Facebook to practice caution:
        - to make sure that our posts about "spiritual activities" are actually accomplishing some sort of encouragement or edification, and not simply "parading" the good we've done:

- **In Verse 6: Jesus continues to add to this point:**
  - Instead of going out of your way to be seen, instead make it your goal to pursue meaningful time alone with the Lord:
  - We should point out that in the same way Jesus is not forbidding prayer when others are around, He is not limiting prayer to an inner rooming your home:
  - And while you will most likely be able to concentrate better when you are away from the distractions of day to day affairs, it isn't the distractions of noise or commotion that the Lord is concerned about:
    - **One Gospel preacher** has noted that “the greatest distraction to true *conversation* with God is not noise or other people but the human ego”
    - In other words: Jesus is telling us to remove all selfishness from the equation:
    - Even praying in a closet isn't going to do any good if we think to ourselves: “how spiritual I am for praying in this closet!”
      - I think about one like the Apostle Paul: He prayed everywhere all the time: He prayed in prisons, he prayed on ships and in ship wrecks; he prayed with his brethren, in synagogues and in cities; but the one constant in his prayers was that they came from a pure and humble heart ***no matter where they were offered.***
- **Jesus says in vs 5 that** if we fail to take the message of selfless service to heart, we will still have a reward, but it is shallow and worthless: We will have the admiration of other hypocrites over our fake spirituality:
- The other option, what we desire, is to be pleasing to God— we may have to wait longer for our reward, but it is ***far*** greater.

### ***Verse 7***

- Another of the issues that the religious elite among the Jews suffered from was saying extremely long prayers, simply for the purpose of saying extremely long prayers!
  - **Jesus makes mention** of this in his rebuke of the Pharisees in **Luke 20:47**; in the midst of making mention of many of the practices that the scribes did to be seen, wearing long robes, giving and receiving respectful greetings, getting the best seats at the banquets, He mentions those who “*for appearance's sake offer long prayers*”

- And while this was most certainly a terrible practice, this isn't what is being referenced in verse 7:
  - **Notice that those who are** being singled out as giving meaningless repetition are the **Gentiles**
  - One of the great differences is that the Pharisees were offering their prayers, but were not doing so to be heard by God; they didn't really care if He heard them so long as other people did:
  - **The Gentiles** on the other hand; they wanted their prayers to be heard; vs 7 points this out:
  - The problem is that they were completely ignorant of what they were supposed to be doing:
    - Recall Paul's visit to **Athens** in **Acts 17**: in verse 22 he points out that these Gentiles were all very religious: He calls attention to their altar for the UNKNOWN GOD in vs 23, and states that they worshipped in ignorance:
  - We often point out just how radically different the idols that the tribes of Canaan worshipped were from Jehovah:
    - The works of fiction that described them paint them as immoral, and vicious:
      - **We don't often** make that comparison when discussing the Gentiles in the New Testament, but the same is true:
      - If you recall the stories of Greek and Roman mythology; you'll remember that those characters were all pretty despicable people: They didn't really care for the lives of mortal men; and in fact were mostly just the cause of a lot of terror and trouble:
      - The way to please whatever god or goddess you worshipped was not through living a life of holiness, but by the sheer volume of your sacrifices: The more you did for Apollo or Ares, well the more they were sure to notice you:
        - And so the vain repetition in verse 7 is not simply a prayer that is long for the sake of length: **But it is the idea that** the secret to successful prayers is strictly a matter of numbers:
        - **Wouldn't you say that** this attitude is still alive and well today?

- Instead of viewing service to God as something that must come from a sincere heart, people still imagine they they are working on a barter system with the Lord!
- Prayer is not to be boiled down to a formula to be repeated again and again: God doesn't want us to memorize a set of phrases, rattle them off, and end it with an "in Jesus name", and then Presto! prayer accomplished!
- **As Jesus has continued to say**, pleasing prayer comes from a sincere and humble heart.

### **Verse 8**

- It has been suggested that another reason the Gentiles spent so much time in prayer was that they were afraid that they might leave something out:
  - You think about it, they were spending all of their time trying to get the attention of gods that couldn't care less about them in the first place; So if you didn't mention every single possible thing down to the smallest detail, then you might have a need that could go without being cared for:
  - **Whatever it is that is under consideration**, there is a clear contrast: The gentiles live in a state of fear that their prayers won't be effective: ***Servants of the true God*** have no cause for fear, because their Father knows all of their needs before they can even ask:
  - **But we should not mistake this** as discouragement to pray: As Jesus will point outing Chapter 7:7-8, it is those who ask who will receive:
    - But rather this is to give us a sense of encouragement that when we offer sincere prayer from our hearts, we can know that they are being heard by a God who cares and is concerned with our needs.
- **Some may still ask**, why do we need to pray if God truly already knows everything we need?
  - Prayer is a time and avenue for us to grow closer to our Father:
    - It is a time when we are expressing our inner thoughts; and opening your hearts to someone forms a bond: I've spoken with people who have described feeling that God

was very distant from them, or didn't seem as real sometimes; *almost without fail* they do not go to Him in prayer on a regular basis:

- **Prayer is a time when we** express our faith to God:
  - James 1:5-8 speak about asking of God in faith and without a double mind: Prayer is a time when we demonstrate that we know we have a need, and we know have confidence that God can meet those needs:
- **Prayer is a confidence builder**
  - We've spoken about prayer being a time when our hearts are made known to the Lord: For the wicked this is a terrible thought! Don't let the light shine on me because I know what you'll see!
  - But for the righteous it should be a time of refreshment: Where we are going to God, casting our cares on Him, asking for forgiveness if needed, and walking away knowing that our prayer has been heard:
  - *Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way. Psalm 139:23-24*