

MATTHEW 6: 5-13

PRAYER ACCORDING TO JESUS

If we are honest, we have all had our doubts about prayer. This is evident to me when talking to other pastors about prayer meetings. The consensus is that if you hold a prayer meeting, the majority of the church won't attend. That has been my experience also. Our Sunday night Face Time meetings are consistently attended but not by the majority of the church. I don't say this to scold anyone. But I do believe that prayer for many people is an "ad hoc" thing in which we all know we should practice and believe in, but we feel frustrated by what we perceive as a lack of response on God's part. In our drive-by world we have become accustomed to instant gratification. And when we don't get it, we quickly move on to something or someone else.

Today we will read what Jesus says regarding prayer: the right and wrong motives as well as the right and wrong method.

I would like you to take yourself back to that hill on the northern end of the Sea of Galilee and see what is happening as we read what He said.

Matthew 6:5

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.

Straight out of the gate, we see the same thing we saw when Jesus spoke of giving: it is assumed, it is a given that believers will give and now we see that it is a given that they will also pray. God expects Christians to pray, earnestly and fervently.

Ps. 32:6,7

6 For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You

In a time when You may be found;

Surely in a flood of great waters

They shall not come near him.

7 You are my hiding place;

You shall preserve me from trouble;

You shall surround me with songs of deliverance.

Selah

The Psalm states that all who are Godly will pray.

James 5:16-18

6 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.

18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

James states that fervent prayer; that is intense prayers avail/ produce much. He then goes on to place us into the same category as Elijah when it comes to whether or not our prayers can be effective.

So we are told that we are expected to pray and that we should pray with intensity. That we are to pray in faith is also mentioned by James because he speaks of the prayers of the righteous.

- **Then why don't we do it?**
- **Or why don't we do it more often and more consistently?**
- **And why don't we see more results?**

I would venture to say that all three questions have the same answer. Most of us have tried it and feel that we didn't receive an answer. Or maybe we didn't get a timely answer. Or maybe we didn't get the answer we wanted. At any rate, many of us feel that prayer just doesn't work, at least when we come down to a grave issue.

But Jesus primarily is speaking of the "how" and not so much the "why." So I don't want to leave the context. But suffice it to say that if we believe Him and believe IN Him, and it is a given that as believers we are to pray, a command, as it were, then we should pray and the results will follow.

"Prayer is for God's glory and our benefit." R.C. Sproul

Once again Jesus speaks to the external showing of prayer for the purpose of being seen. Last week we saw how He spoke of giving for the purpose of being seen. This speaks to the issue of being in the flesh and wanting to be seen as righteous by others. Jesus said nothing against public prayer. We see plenty of

examples in scripture of this. But it is the motive behind the public prayer that is vain.

In the first century Jewish world there were many common prayers.

- Shemiyah, Dt. 6:4 which were to be said upon waking and once again before going to bed.
- 4 **“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!**
- Then there was the amidah, which consisted of 18-19 blessings that were to be recited 3 times per day: 9, noon and 3 pm. If one was careful, he could place himself in just the right place to be seen by many at these times.
- The motive is wrong.
- They have their reward.
- They are not earnest/ honest in their prayers. God paid them no mind.

Matthew 6:6

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.

The right/ pure motive

The idea of going into a room, the Greek word speaks of something akin to the Upper Room we read about later, not necessarily a small closet. But the idea is that private prayer or should I say, prayer which is personal is not done to be seen. That is not to say that you have to be alone. The disciples were in a group in the upper room, but it was a time of intimate prayer, a conversation with God.

- John 17: the longest recorded prayer of Jesus. He first prayed for himself, then those given to Him by the Father and lastly for the world. It was an appeal to God in conversational form. And that is what true prayer is.
- Prayer should be personal.
- When Jesus healed the leper He told the leper not to tell anyone how he was healed but to go and show himself to the priest in order that the healing could be confirmed. He was rewarded openly after a personal encounter with Jesus.
- The true motive behind prayer is to draw close to God in order to converse with Him. It is not to be done in order to be seen as righteous by others.
- It pays to pray.

Matthew 6:7

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.

Matthew 6:8

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

We are not use vain repetitions. It amazes me that the model prayer Jesus gives His disciples just below this command is so often repeated as if it were a prayer to be recited. (Our Father; Paternoster)

One that thing we can see in Jesus' own prayer life, at least for the most part is brevity. It is true that often Jesus got away to pray and reflect, but outside of His prayer in the garden just prior to His arrest, His prayers aren't all that long. (Jn 17)

I don't believe it is the quantity of words but the quality of the conversation that is important.

- Example: an important conversation with a friend or parent.
- You don't have to wax eloquently. You just have to be honest.
- **"Prayer requires eloquence of the heart more than the tongue. The eloquence of prayer consists in the fervency of desire and the simplicity of faith." Adam Clarke**
- **"Christians' prayers are measured by weight and not by length. Many of the most prevailing prayers have been as short as they were strong." Spurgeon**
- Ecclesiastes 5:2
- **2 Do not be rash with your mouth,**
- **And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God.**
- **For God is in heaven, and you on earth;**
- **Therefore let your words be few.**
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James David Ford, Chaplain of the U.S. House of Representatives beginning in 1979 told this story... **His prayer, "God, I have had enough, amen."**

Prayers don't have to be long to be effective, but they do have to be honest. Can we honestly say that when we rattle something quickly off of our tongues in the midst of a grim diagnosis or news of a family tragedy that we are being honest?

It has been my experience that people will talk for hours to a friend after such news but won't HONESTLY have a conversation with God for what would qualify as quality time. Once again, I'm speaking of honest, quality time; not dishonest glib prayers or eloquent recitals of verses. Speak to God as if you were talking to your father.

- The first uses of "Father" in the NT. Jesus has introduced intimacy to prayer. This was thought to be almost blasphemous by the Jews. They wouldn't even say or write His name for fear of offending Him.
- Prayer is intimate and personal, even if it is done in the presence of others.
- God already knows what we need. He is omniscient. Then why do we spend so much time telling Him what He already knows?

"We don't pray to tell God things that He didn't know before we told Him. We pray to commune with and appeal to a loving God who wants us to bring every need and worry before His throne." Guzik

"Prayer is not designed to inform God, but to give man a sight of his misery; to humble his heart, to excite his desire, to inflame his faith, to animate his hope, to raise his soul from earth to heaven, and to put him in mind that THERE is his Father, his country, and inheritance." Clarke

In this manner, therefore pray

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.

I won't go into a detailed excursus here concerning a formula for prayer. This is just an outline – a model prayer. I want to read it for you from J.B. Phillips' translation. It is accurate and comes across more clearly in these verses, I think.

- **Pray then like this - 'Our Heavenly Father, may your name be honoured; May your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day the bread we need, Forgive us what we owe to you, as we have also forgiven those who owe anything to us. Keep us clear of temptation, and save us from evil'."**
- Note the use of "Our Father." We are a family.
- As we do during "Face Time" we begin by praising God and giving honor to Him and all he is.
- Jesus begins the prayer with the acknowledgement of God as our Father. He prays that the name of God would be honored and that His kingdom would come and that His will would be done.
- There is nothing yet here about our legitimate needs or our felt needs. So far, it is all about God.
- Now, when Jesus finally mentions our needs it is the sense of daily provision. Note it is daily, not a prayer for sustenance over the period of our life times. (The way wages were doled out to most poor Jews in that day was on a daily basis.)
- Prayer is for our needs, not our greeds.
- When prayer is a daily thing, it helps to insure that we come back to talk with God more frequently. His specific plans can change for us on a daily basis. We need to be on the same page, on a daily basis. Imagine only checking in with your spouse or boss once in a blue moon. Healthy relationships don't work that way. There has to be constant maintenance and communication in every healthy relationship. Just as in a garden, if it isn't tended to constantly, weeds will grow and choke out the harvest. Bugs can invade and eat up the crop.
- Our debts, what we owe. This speaks of sin more than anything else. It isn't a clause for bankruptcy.

- Whenever we walk not according to the will of God, we incur a type of debt. And though that was paid at Calvary, we are to be in a constant state of repentance.

1 John 1:9

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- Temptation = test. God does not tempt men to do evil but He does allow us to go through periods of testing. (James 1:13)
- If we are truly sincere and aware of our weaknesses then we should ask God to keep us from those situations.
- **“The man who prays, “Lead us not into temptation” and then goes into it is a liar before God... “Lead us not into temptation” is shameful profanity when it comes from the lips of men who resort to places of amusement whose moral tone is bad.” Spurgeon**
- If we truly pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” it will manifest itself in several ways:
 - 1. We won’t boast in our own strength.**
 - 2. We will never desire trials.**
 - 3. We won’t place in a tempting situation.**
 - 4. We won’t lead others into temptation.**

The story of the young president of a company: Prayed every morning and asked his secretary to hold all appointments and calls. Boisterous chairman was angry at not being able to see him. Burst into the office only to see him kneeling in prayer. “No wonder I come to him for advice.” He then quietly closed the door.