

Matthew 6:5-8
“The Purpose Of Prayer”

2.28.16

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 6. Today we begin a sermon series on prayer that will take us through the next 6 Sundays under the broader umbrella of: “The Characteristics of Prayer.”

"The Characteristics



of Prayer”

We will be looking at what is called THE MODEL PRAYER or The LORD’S PRAYER over the next 6 weeks and here’s a run-down of where we’re headed. We begin today with:

The Characteristics of Prayer:

- 1. The Purpose of Prayer**
- 2. The Worship of Prayer**
- 3. The Priority of Prayer**
- 4. The Provision of Prayer**
- 5. Forgiveness and Prayer**
- 6. The Protection of Prayer**

The question that needs to be asked and answered as we begin this morning is: **What is prayer?**

Now in order to answer this question, we need to go back in time to the Garden of Eden. The Bible says God walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. That was intimate fellowship with God in a perfect place with perfect people and our perfect God. But, then sin entered the equation and God had to separate Himself from Adam and Eve and He banished them out of the Garden because of their disobedience.

No longer did mankind have the ability to commune directly in a physical way with God. So, that intimate communication was broken. However, by the time Adam and Eve’s son Seth started having children Moses records in:

Genesis 4:26

26 To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord.

So, mankind can once again communicate with God, but not face to face. Even though, that is God’s ultimate desire: TO BE WITH US AND FOR US TO SEE HIM.

Revelation 21:1-3

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of

heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."

So, God wants to communicate with us. That's His ultimate goal. That's what he intended from the beginning and it's what we'll see in the end... for all eternity. Face to face with God. So, prayer is God's way of allowing communication with Him.

But, now let's talk about what prayer isn't:

- Prayer isn't mankind's informing God about anything, because He already knows everything.
 - Prayer isn't using God like He's a COSMIC BLESSING MACHINE, where we put in a quarter and we get our wish. No sir! He's our Heavenly Father, not a butler!
 - And Prayer is not mankind's way of twisting God's arm and pleading on His sympathy to get what we want, because He's not a rich uncle. He's our Rock and our Fortress who delivers us from sin!
-

Oswald Chambers says what prayer is in this way.

"When a person is born again from above, the life of the Son of God is born in him, and he can either starve or nourish that life. Prayer is the way that the life of God in us is nourished. Our common ideas regarding prayer are not found in the New Testament. We look upon prayer simply as a means of getting things for ourselves, but the biblical purpose of prayer is that we may get to know God Himself. To say that 'prayer changes things' is not as close to the truth as saying, 'Prayer changes *me* and then I change things.'" Oswald Chambers

You see, prayer **more than anything else,** is sharing the needs and the burdens and the hungers of the human heart with God, our Father, who cares. Prayer is quite simply: **Communion with Almighty God.**

But listen, this can only occur for the believer. The only prayer God is obligated to hear from a non-believer, a non-follower of Christ, is the prayer of repentance and cry for salvation. That's it! A lost person can expect nothing from God except a plea for mercy through salvation. The only prayer God hears from a lost person is the one being cried out for salvation.

Church family, prayer isn't about getting things. It isn't about forcing God to do something. It's not about God being our Divine Butler. Prayer is the mechanism God has given to mankind so that we might know Him and commune with Him here on earth until we see Him face to face. That's the purpose of prayer!

But yet, once again, as we've seen over and over, the Pharisees have blown it on God's purpose and original intention...in this case...with prayer. They have taken what was intended by God in relation to how we talk and commune with Him and totally twisted it and perverted it once again. Look with me at Jesus' words in:

Matthew 6:5-8

5 "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.

Now for those of you who might be new and for those of you who might be like me and can't remember what you had for lunch yesterday; let me give a bit of review to remind us what's going on. Jesus is speaking on a hillside just outside of the Galilean town of Capernaum. Remember our artist's depiction of what this looked like:



He is not ONLY speaking to His disciples, but also those who have become enamored by His miracles and curious in His teachings. But, there are others on that hillside as well. There are also Pharisees and Scribes on that hillside and they represented the phony religious system of the Jewish people.

What Jesus has been doing in His “Sermon on the Mount” is contrasting true spiritual life with the false standards of the Pharisaic system of that day. He has already told them that their theology is inadequate and substandard to God's Word in Chapter 5, and now, here in chapter 6 He's going to give practical examples of how true followers of God should live.

Last week we saw this play out in the realm of giving, in that our giving should be done in a way that brings honor to the name of God and not to ourselves. And now, we're going to see Jesus move to the area of prayer and Jesus would expose the Pharisees once again. You see, eventually Jesus would say: “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees,” which meant, “Don't let the hypocrisy of the Pharisees creep into your thinking about truly worshiping God.”

Let me give you some background, quickly. **Please turn with me to Deuteronomy 6.**

What you and I are going to read is what is known as the **Shema**. It is the most important prayer in Judaism and the children were taught this prayer (literally) from birth. They repeated this prayer morning and night. The Jews prayed the third, sixth, ninth hour. (We talked Wed. night about how Daniel prayed three times a day with his windows open.)

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. **5** You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. **6** And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. **7** You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. **8** You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. **9** You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

This prayer became something that the Jews could repeat without even thinking. And the Jewish Rabbis developed prayers for everything. If you read ancient Jewish writings you'll find they had prayers for when there was a fire, they had prayers for lightening, prayers for seeing a new moon,

prayers for a comet, prayers for rain, prayers for when they received good news, and prayers for when they received bad news.

Get this...they even had a prayer for when they got new furniture. They had prayer when they left a city or town and a prayer for when they entered the next town. They had a prayer for everything. They had learned to rattle off a prayer for almost anything. And here's the thing...the original intent of the Rabbis was good. They were trying to bring everything into the presence of God to make every part of their life and even every act of nature into something that drew a person near to God. But instead, there became a total commitment to prescribed, predigested, pre-developed, ritualistic prayers. In fact, by the time Jesus arrived on the scene, the Pharisees had taken it to a new level of hypocrisy.

Matthew 6:5

5 "And when you pray..."

Now, the Lord assumes we're going to pray. He says, "And WHEN you pray..." Praying is as natural for a believer in God as jumping is to a grasshopper. It becomes as natural as breathing. Yet, Jesus says:

Matthew 6:5

...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.

Remember what a hypocrite is?



The Greek word intimates an actor on a stage in the theater, or a pretender. Jesus said, "Don't pretend with your praying to be seen by men." Where?

First is the synagogue. This is a picture of a replica of the synagogue in Nazareth in Jesus' day.



The Synagogue was a place of assembly. It took 10 families to start one. It was really the forerunner of the Christian Church building. It was here that public prayers were made, and there's nothing wrong with that, except when it's done for show! And you

see, here's the problem, the Scribes and Pharisees weren't praying for the sake of communing with God. No! They loved prayer because it gave them the opportunity of making themselves noticed. **And they even prayed in the streets at the street corners and intersections! Gag!!!!**

Remember last week how the Pharisees gave their coins by dropping them into the money collection boxes.



They made a big show of it! What hypocrites! And whether you give like that or pray like that, you have your reward. That's it! Remember, God owes a hypocrite (a pretender) nothing. They got their reward the moment they did it for men! They were fully receipted. They got their reward right then. The transaction is complete and there will be nothing in heaven. When they swipe their card looking for reward points there will be:



God owes a hypocrite nothing.

Matthew Henry says this about praying to be seen by men:

“It is not to men that we pray, nor from them that we expect an answer. They are but dust and ashes like ourselves, and therefore we must not have our eye on them.” Matthew Henry

Jesus said...instead of praying before men...go into your room (closet, your private place).

Matthew 6:6

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.

How many of you saw this movie?



The lady in the movie, “Clara” had a war room. She prayed in private like Jesus was describing.

Listen...I love talking to y'all, but I really love talking to my wife and spending time with her. And guess what... I can talk to her right here in this room. But, there are times when Pam and I need to talk about some things in private. We need to plan and share and communicate. And the same is true of the Lord.

Let me say it to you this way. Think with me. What if the Lord Jesus appeared in bodily form right here and said, **“Kevin, I would like to talk with you for 10 minutes. I want you to come into this side room over here...just the two of us and I want you to tell me what's on your heart.”** Do you understand? It's just me and the Lord...for 10 minutes...face to face and I can talk to Him about anything.

Let me tell you something...I wouldn't waste my time with a bunch of repetitious babbling! I'd get on with it. Wouldn't you? I wouldn't say now I lay me down to sleep and bless this food to the nourishment of our bodies... I would speak from my heart.

But, get this...there is no time limit (10 minutes) and I don't have to hurry because I can talk to Him anytime I want to! How astounding is that!! So, talk to Him and when you do...don't waste time. Jesus said:

Matthew 6:7

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.”

It's easy to pray with vain repetitions. It's been said that we all have at least one routine prayer in our system and once we get rid of it, then we can really start praying. I know this to be true in my life. I was thinking about it. Sometimes I'll be praying here in front of you and honestly, it's like I'm putting the needle down on an old record...

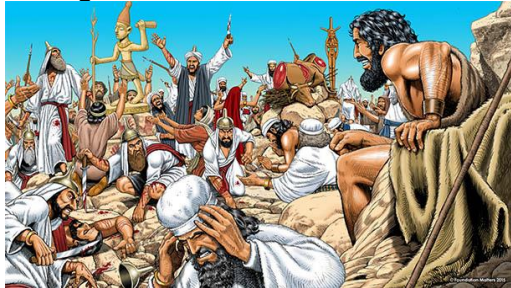


...and out comes this pre-recorded prayer. Do you know what I'm talking about?

In fact, I can remember when I was a little boy in this church and there was a man who would pray and he said, "Father" like every third word. **Father, we thank you for this day Father. And Father we praise you Father that you Father have brought us to your house Father.** You know...that kind of thing...

In fact, he would pray so long, I used to count how many times he said Father. I remember counting one time that he said Father like 30 times. I guess little kids are more conscious of that kind of thing.

Do you remember the babbling of the prophets of Baal when they were trying to prove to Elijah that their gods were real?



They were hollering and screaming! And Elijah really gave them a hard time. Elijah said, "Keep on chanting...maybe they're on vacation. Maybe they can't hear you...yell louder. They might be asleep! You know they prayed all day long babbling and mumbling the same old stuff. And I've seen this. I saw it at the Wailing Wall in Israel.



All those Jews standing there... rocking back and forth repeating the same prayer over and over. They even write out their prayers and stick them in the cracks...



...of the wall. And they believe as long as they stay wedged in the crack, that prayer is constantly being offered to God. That's vain repetition! But understand something. Jesus is not saying, "Don't ask for something more than once." No, remember how He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane? He went three times...back and forth from the sleeping

disciples to His Father. Paul prayed three times for his thorn and the flesh to be removed. No, the point is that we should seek to avoid insincere babbling. We shouldn't offer up vain repetitions.

You see, the danger is to just SAY prayers and not really PRAY prayers.

But, let me ask you something, if God knows it all then why pray? Jesus said...

Matthew 6:8

8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

So, why do we pray since God knows it all anyway? The answer to this question is very simple... Because we need to talk to the Father and release our burdens!

Listen, there is something powerful about coming to the Father and giving Him your anxieties and burdens, because when you come to the Father in prayer, you show your dependence on Him and your trust in Him and you remember all of His promises and His love for you because He sent Jesus to die for you. But listen...when we come to the Father, we must leave it with Him.

Andrew came to me one time recently and asked me to fix one of his Legos. I needed pliers to pull off that piece and I went to do it a few minutes later. He had taken it back and when I found him in his room, there he was struggling with it again. I knew how to fix...I knew what to do...but, He had to bring it to me, but leave it with me. And the same is true of our Heavenly Father.

And that brings us back to the beginning of the message and the desire of the Heavenly Father to have a relationship with us. It takes us back to the Garden of Eden, where God walked with mankind in the cool of the day, but then we fast-forward to another Garden. This Garden...



...the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus is praying. Praying to His Father. This prayer is found in John 17 and it's the prayer He prayed sweating drops of blood. Jesus didn't babble or ramble or stick pieces of paper in the dirt. Jesus sweating blood was pouring out His heart when the Apostle John recorded these words:

John 17:1-5

1 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, **2** since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. **3** And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. **4** I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. **5** And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

And near the end of the prayer Jesus prayed this...

John 17:24

24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

Do you see, Jesus wants us to know him...and see him and experience His glory along with His Father. Church family, prayer isn't about getting things. It isn't about forcing God to do something.

It's not about God being our Divine Butler. Prayer is the mechanism God has given to mankind so that we might know Him and commune with Him here on earth until we see Him face to face. That is the purpose of prayer!
