

LEARNING TO PRAY IN THE SECRET PLACE

Matthew 6:7-10

Intro: In considering verses 5 and 6 of Matthew 6 last week, we learned that the Lord placed a definite priority upon private prayer. It is not that public prayer is wrong, or even that it is to be avoided, but there are certain temptations facing those who pray in public. It is easy to begin to pray for the approval of people, and to forget that all true prayer is to be addressed to God, and expressed in a manner that is pleasing to God. So those of us who pray in public need to be aware of the dangers, and, by the grace of God, seek to avoid them.

Today I want to move on to verses 7 and 8. And here we have:

I. ANOTHER WARNING CONCERNING PRAYER (Matt. 6:7-8).

Those of you who were here last Sunday morning will remember, I hope, that I spent a moment pointing out the difference between “thou” and “ye.” “Thou” is singular, and that is what we have in verse 6. But in verse 7 the Lord used the plural, “ye.” The emphasis in verse 6 was for each one of our Lord’s disciples *individually*. But in verse 7 the Lord was addressing them as a group, and it may mean that the Lord was referring to times when they were praying together. Of course the same would apply to private prayer. There has always been the idea among non-Christian religious people that they are heard because of their “much speaking.” They will repeat the same expression over and over again. It is something like we all have done as small children, asking our parents over and over again for something that we want very much. And we did this, or do this, because we think that in the end we will succeed. There are probably illustrations of this kind of praying in every heathen religion in the world.

Now again we need to be wise in understanding what the Lord was talking about. He was not saying that we should not repeat prayers that we pray. Our Lord prayed practically the same words each time He left His disciples and went into the inner part of the Garden of Gethsemane.

Also, you will notice repetition in the Psalms. Sometimes it is the form of a refrain that may be mentioned two or three times in the Psalm, or it might be like we have in Psalm 136 where every one of its twenty-six verses concludes with, “For His mercy endureth for ever.”

So the Lord was not saying that we can’t repeat our prayers, not that we cannot use the same expression over and over again. *But what He was*

saying was that we are not to think that this is the way that we get the Lord to answer our prayers! Nor are we to pray long prayers with that same idea in mind. Sometimes the shortest prayers can be the most effective – like our Lord prayed from the Cross. However, at other times we may be so burdened about something that we will spend a long time in prayer.

You see, the point that the Lord was making was that while we all need to pray, yet we are not to be like a person try to make his appeal to someone, and trying to find the most persuasive words to use. What actually is the truth concerning prayer? It is this: “Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him” (Matt. 6:8b).

See this same idea in verse 32.

Let me take just a moment with this title that our Lord used for God, Whom we often refer to as the first Person of the Godhead. I am speaking of the term, “Father.”

Here in the Sermon on the Mount we have it in:

1) Matt. 5:16, 45, and 48.

2) Matt. 6:1, 4, 6 (2x), 8, 9, 14, 15, 18 (2x), 26, and 32.

But notice that every time it is either “your Father,” or “thy Father.”

Three times it is “your heavenly Father,” and once at the beginning of the prayer which starts in verse 9, the Lord taught the disciples when praying to say, “Our Father.”

Only rarely in the OT do you find God referred to as the Father of His people. But that emphasis became very strong in the ministry of our Lord, and, of course, you know how prominent it is in the rest of the NT as well. It is especially important for us to think of God as our Father when it comes to prayer. If He is our Father, and He is, then this means that we are His children; we are members of His family. Unfortunately, some people have some very unhappy memories connected with the man who is their earthly father, and it may be difficult for them to appreciate as Christians what it means that God is our Father, our heavenly Father! We should not get our idea of what fathers should be from human fathers, but from what the Bible teaches us about God as our heavenly Father.

But we need a word of explanation at this point.

It is commonly taught in many churches that we are all the children of God, that every human being is a child of God. *But this is not what the Bible teaches!* We are all God’s creatures. He is the One Who formed us

in our mothers' wombs, but that is not what the Lord had in mind. We are not born into God's family when we are born into this world, but we are born into the family of God when the Lord Jesus Christ saves us from our sins. Let me give you a couple of NT passages to support this.

In John 1:11-13 we have these words, speaking of Christ:

- 11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.
- 12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:
- 13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Actually the word "sons" in verse 12 is the Greek word for *children*. Only those who have received the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior are the children of God.

The other verse I want to give you is in the book of Galatians, Gal. 3:26, where the Apostle Paul wrote: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." And there the Greek word is actually *sons*. *Sons*, of course, means *sons and daughters*. Paul was not writing to all Galatians, but to those Galatians who were trusting Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Contrary to what many sincere Christians teach, we are not adopted into God's family; we are born into the family of God, and God is our heavenly Father. And He is a perfect Father, the only perfect Father there ever has been, or ever will be. And most of our progress in the Christian life can be traced to how well we understand that God is our Father. But here is one very wonderful truth about God: "'Your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him'" (Matt. 6:8b).

Just think about that for a moment. That is true of every child that God has. How many children do you think that God has on earth today? I don't know, and nobody but God Himself knows. But I am sure that we would be safe in saying that He has millions of children, millions whom He has brought into His family through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We sometimes feel greatly outnumbered in this world, but God has His children everywhere! And He can truthfully say about all of us, "I know everything that you have need of even before you ask me to supply yours needs." Lucille and I have four children, and when they were growing up we never knew all of their needs. We knew many of their needs, but not all of them. *But here is God with His large, large family of children which He has personally chosen, children of all ages, and He knows all of our needs, and never for one moment gets us mixed up with each other!* That is amazing truth, isn't it?

But let me ask this question: If He knows our needs, why do we need to pray about them?

I am sure that I don't know the whole answer to that question, but let me give you a couple of answers.

Perhaps the main reason is this: We need to pray because it pleases God when we come to Him, not just to have our needs met, but because we want to be with Him. And the other side of that is that He wants us to come to Him. I am sure that one reason the Lord gives us the trials we have, and the needs we have, is because that is one way He has of getting us to come to Him. You and I can't possibly appreciate how much our heavenly Father delights in our fellowship.

But a second reason is this.

As our Father, He wants us to recognize that He is the One Who meets all of our needs. We don't need to go beyond the Lord. He blesses us constantly through people, but the ultimate source of all of our blessings is our heavenly Father. And when we pray, we don't need a lot of fancy words; we don't need to feel that He is reluctant about supplying our needs. We don't need to bombard Him with the same words over and over again. He knows all about us, He knows our every need, and we can't please Him any more than when we come to Him to lay our requests before Him.

Let us always remember when we come to God in prayer, that we are coming to our Father, our heavenly Father, and He loves for us to call Him, "Father." And the amazing thing about this relationship that we have with God is that He is also the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! How could we possibly be blessed any more than we are? No heathen has in his religion anything that can compare with what we have since our God, the living God of heaven and earth, has condescended to claim us as His children so that we can call Him, "Father, our Father."

Now I am not going to get as far into my text as I wanted to, but let me just get us started into what is generally called, *The Lord's Prayer*. Actually we can call it *The Lord's Prayer*, because He gave it to us, but not because this was a prayer He prayed. If you want to see the prayer He prayed, you will have to go to John 17. Only He could pray that prayer. We could take some of those requests He prayed, and pray they as well, but the prayer as a whole is *the true Lord's prayer*. This prayer which we are coming to now in Matthew 6 is:

II. THE MODEL PRAYER.

I call your attention to the word “manner” in verse 9: “After this manner therefore pray ye.”

The Lord gave this prayer as a pattern for us to follow in our praying. I doubt if He intended that this be used as a prayer for people to pray the way it is used in many churches today. It can become so familiar to people that they can say it without even thinking about what they are saying. And in that way it becomes *a vain repetition*. It is probably the only prayer that many people say, people who know nothing about a prayer closet, or secret place of prayer. And I would venture to say that most people have never deliberately taken the time to memorize it; they have learned it by hearing others say it over and over again on Sunday mornings. Prayer was never meant by God just to be something which we can say by heart, but prayer is meant to be coming to God and speaking to Him from our hearts!

Luke gives us a similar account in Luke 11:1-4, but there it was given by our Lord in answer to a request which came from His disciples that the Lord would teach them to pray. Probably the first prayer that any of us should pray ought to be the prayer of the disciples, “Lord, teach us to pray.” How many of us have ever presented that request to the Lord? This undoubtedly is one of our greatest needs, and there is no great teacher of prayer than our Lord Jesus Christ. And it is not just a need we have when we first come to the Savior, but it is a need that continues all through our lives here on earth. There is always more that we need to know about prayer.

But the Lord Jesus began His lesson by saying, “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father ...” In Luke’s account it is reported that the Lord said, “When ye pray, say, Our Father ...”

In the providence of God we have all been placed in this world in families. Each one of us has, or has had, a father, a mother, and possibly also siblings -- a brother or a sister, or possibly both, and perhaps even more than that.. But do you remember as parents how you waited for those first words of recognition from your child. Would that little child say “Dada” first, or “Mama”? And what a thrill it was when you heard that first word of recognition, whether it was “Dada,” or “Mama.”

The Apostle Paul in Romans 8 and again in Galatians 3 tells us that God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts whereby we cry, “Abba, Father.” “Abba” is Aramaic for “Father,” but it is like our word “Papa” or

“Dada.” These are words which a child can speak before he or she has any teeth.

Now let me ask you a question. Do you suppose that the Lord lets us as parents experience such great joy when our children recognize us for the first time so that we will know that joy that fills His heart when for the first time we as His children say to Him, “Abba, Father”? The Apostle Paul also taught us that no one can call Jesus “Lord” except by the Spirit of God, and in Romans 8 and Galatians 3 we learn that no one can truly call God his Father except by the Spirit of God.

Think of all of the glorious titles you and I can use in addressing God. He is the Almighty God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the God of all the earth, the all wise God, or just simply God. But apparently there is no name that God would rather hear from you and me than simply that great name, “Father.” He is my Father, your Father, our Father, our heavenly Father. Our Lord called God in John 17, “Holy Father” (v. 11), and “O righteous Father”(v. 25), and just “Father” several other times. So we can probably say that there is nothing, no Name or Title that we can use for God that brings Him greater joy than when we simply say, “Father.”

Concl: Thomas Watson, one of the Puritans, wrote an entire book on *The Lord's Prayer*. And in it he pointed out ten lessons that we should learn from being able to call God, our Father. I give these to you in a brief statement for each as I close, trusting that these will find a response in each one of our hearts. Listen to what Thomas Watson said about these words of our Lord which we have been considering:

- 1) If God is our Father, “Let us depend upon Him in all our straits and exigencies; let us believe that He will provide for all our wants [needs].
- 2) If God be our Father, let us imitate Him.
- 3) If God be our Father, let us submit patiently to His will. If He lay His strokes on us, they are the corrections of a Father, not the punishments of a judge.
- 4) If God is our Father, let us cause in us a childlike reverence.
- 5) If God is our Father, let us walk obediently.
- 6) If God is our Father, let us show by our cheerful looks that we are children of such a Father.
- 7) If God be our Father, let us honor Him by walking very holily.
- 8) If God be our Father, let us love all that [who] are His children.
- 9) If God be our Father, let us show heavenly-mindedness.
- 10) If God be our Father, let us own Him as such in the worst times; stand up to His cause, and defend His truths.

And let us never forget these words of our Lord, “After this manner

therefore pray ye: Our Father ... “ We have no greater claim upon His blessings than that He is our Father and we are His children, and we owe to God and to Christ and to the Holy Spirit all of the glory for such a precious relationship.