

WHEN YOU PRAY

Part 1

Matthew 6:7-15

Intro: The passage that we come to here at the beginning of chapter 6 in Matthew's Gospel, has to be the most important part of the entire Sermon on the Mount because it has to do specifically with our relationship to God. *It has to do with prayer! It has to do with fellowship with God, because that is really what prayer is: fellowship with God!* And, while there are many other wonderful passages dealing with prayer in the Bible, these words are of special importance because they are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. The only other place that we find these words is in the Gospel of Luke (a parallel, but not altogether an identical passage), and there, in Luke 11:1, we find that the Lord gave these words to His disciples at their request when they asked Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." I don't mean that the situation in Luke 11 was the same as here in Matthew 5,6, and 7, but the wording in the two passages is very similar. There is nothing more important that any of us as the children of God has to do than to learn to pray, and we could not have a greater teacher to teach us than our Lord Jesus Christ.

If you were here last Sunday morning, and most of you were, I hope that you remember that I pointed out that the Lord did not speak about praying by saying, "if you pray," but in verses 5, 6, and 7 He said, "when you pray." His words assume that, if you are a child of God, you will pray, and that prayer will be a major part of you life every day. I probably have read more books on prayer than on any other subject. And many of them I have read more than once. I am ready to listen to anyone who can help me with my praying. One reason I love to read Christian biography is because of the place that prayer had in the lives of so many men and women who have lived and walked with the Lord in days gone by. But here in Matthew we have the privilege of being taught by the Son of God Who knows the Father better than anyone else knows Him. This past week in our Bible reading we had this brief statement about our Lord found in Luke 5:16 when He had been busy all day healing people: "And He withdrew himself into the wilderness [desert], and prayed."

So prayer is one subject that ought to be of primary importance to all of us who know the Lord. If we are saved, if God is our Father because we have been born into His family, we are going to pray. If you never pray there can only be one reason: you are not saved. But if you truly know

the Lord, you may not pray as much as you should, but you are going to pray.

So this passage has to do with those of us who know the Lord, those of us who belong to Him. The Lord is speaking to all of us when He said, “When you pray.”

Last week we learned the first major lesson that the Lord gave to His disciples about prayer. And it had to do with *where* we are to pray. And He clearly indicated to His disciples that the first place to learn to pray is in private, and that is the main place to pray throughout life after that.

From what the Lord said about the Pharisees and scribes, whom He addressed as “hypocrites,” we are led to believe that they had no private prayer life; all of their praying was done in public – either in the synagogues, or on the street corners. They *loved* (notice that word in verse 5) to pray anyplace where men could see them, and hear them. And the Lord said in so many words, “That’s what they wanted, and that’s what they got, and that was all that they would get.” “They have their reward.”

The Lord was not saying that it is wrong to pray in public, but He was saying that if that is all that you do, you aren’t really praying. I remember reading of a man, a pastor, who, when he prayed was so absorbed with the Lord that it was like he wasn’t even aware of the congregation that was before him. It is private prayer that gives power to public prayer. So don’t be ashamed if you can’t pray in public. Those of us who need to be ashamed, are those of us who pray in public, but pray little or not at all in private.

So what are we to do? We learn in verse 6. Each of us is to have a closet. Have some place, your bedroom, or your den, or some place in your house where you can get alone with the Lord. Let Him speak to you through His Word, and then you respond where nobody but you and the Lord are able to hear what you are saying. That is where you will find the Father, “in secret,” in the secret place.

But now we come to our text for today – in verse 7. It answers the question:

I. HOW ARE WE NOT TO PRAY?

(Read verse 7.)

This is evidently a characteristic of all heathen religions. The more a person repeats certain phrases, the more likely that his god will hear him, and the greater the possibility that he will convince his god to respond favorably to him. Men's prayers are usually more effective than women's prayers, and the more men you can get praying at the same time, the greater the possibility that they can convince their god, or gods, to do what they are being asked to do.

We have an OT illustration of praying like the heathen do when Elijah challenged two hundred and fifty prophets of Baal to show that their gods were the true gods. Let me read the account to you from 1 Kings 18 beginning with verse 25:

25 And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under.

26 And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made.

27 And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.

28 And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them.

29 And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded (1 Kings 18:25-29).

Then at the end of the day it was Elijah's turn. He built his altar of twelve stones, put the wood on it and the pieces of the bullock's body on the altar. Then three times he had four barrels of water poured on the sacrifice. Then he prayed. No one prayed with him. He prayed this simple prayer:

36 And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all

these things at thy word.

37 Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again (1 Kings 18:36-37).

What happened? Fire fell from heaven and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, *and the stones, and the dust, and licked up what remained of the twelve barrels of water!*

You all have seen pictures of Moslem men at prayer, but we haven't heard them saying in Arabic, over and over again, "Allah is great, Allah is great," and on and on.

Aren't some Christians like that also? They believe that the more people we have praying, the more likely it is that God will give us what we are praying for. But that is wrong! We don't persuade God against His will. We don't convince Him to do something contrary to His will regardless of how many people are praying. Elijah, one man, prayed to the living God, and God answered in a marvelous way.

But now in our text we come to the good part. The Lord told them how to pray. I am not even going to try to get through this prayer in one message, but in several, because of its extreme importance. I don't think that the Lord gave this prayer as a prayer for us to pray (although there certainly is nothing wrong to praying it IF those who are praying are true believers, and if the requests in it come from our hearts. But we don't have any record that the Lord ever prayed this prayer. In fact, He did not need to pray this prayer which asked for the forgiveness of sins. He had no sin in Him. Nor are we told of a single instance when any of the apostles prayed this prayer, nor that any other believer prayed this pray. It is a model prayer. It contains the main ingredients of true prayer. We need to take all of our Lord's teaching on prayer if we are to learn how to pray, and we find some of His teaching in John 14, 15, and 16. The real Lord's prayer is in John 17.

But why do we not need to use vain repetitions? Note what the Lord said about:

II. GOD'S KNOWLEDGE OF US AND OUR NEEDS (Matt. 6:8).

I am reading a book on prayer right now written by a Puritan by the name of Thomas Cobbet. In his chapter in which he discusses the importance

of faith in prayer, he reminds his readers of Heb. 11:6, which says:

6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

But then Mr. Cobbet went on to mention that there are certain things that we need to know about God is we are to come to Him in faith. And one of those things is God's omniscience. You see, one of God's great attributes is His omniscience, His knowledge of everybody and everything, past, present, and future. The heathen have to inform their gods of the needs they have because that is the only way the gods have of knowing – when somebody tells them. That is why the heathen have to go through all kinds of contortions and vain repetitions to get their attention. But our God knows our needs before we say a word to Him about them. And that truth applies to all of us. What comfort there is in this! You and I don't have a single need but what our heavenly Father knows all about it. But I will tell you something else. He knows needs we have which we have not yet discovered ourselves!

Then why do we need to pray? Because the Lord loves for us to come to Him and to acknowledge before Him that we are looking to Him to meet our needs. Praying is anything but a waste of time. Our needs are designed to turn us to the Lord, and to keep our expectation directed toward Him. That is a primary reason for every trial that we have.

But I must move along, and so let me ask you to look with me at verse 9. How did the Lord say that we should begin when we pray?

II. HOW DO WE BEGIN?

Listen as I read verse 9 of Matthew 6.

In verse 6 we learned that we are to go into our closets and pray *to our Father*. In verse 8 we are told that our Father knows our needs before we ask Him – even though no one else knows what our needs are. So in the secrecy of our closets we say, “Our Father which art in heaven.”

How simple are these words of our Lord, and yet how profound. Only in a few rare instances do we find God addressed as Father in the OT. But this is what He wants us to call Him because that is exactly what He is, “Our Father.” He is our Father because we are His children, not adopted, but we have been born into His family. We have His life in us. He has

chosen us to be His, His in Christ. What amazing grace that we, only sinners saved by God's grace, should be told that when we pray we are to address the living and eternal God, the God of heaven and earth, as "our Father"! This is a subject for prolonged meditation. We need to think about this until the truth of it floods our souls with the blessing of God. I am a child of God, and He is my heavenly Father.

But while we enjoy great intimacy with our heavenly Father, yet, at the same time, there is a word of instruction here. He is our *heavenly* Father! Solomon helps us to understand the significance of the word "heavenly" by what he wrote in Ecc. 5:2. In that verse we read:

2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.

Because He is our Father, we have access to Him at all times. But since He is in heaven, our heavenly Father, we must always approach Him with the greatest reverence and with a constant remembrance of His excellent majesty and His infinite glory. And since He is God, we never have to give a thought as to whether or not He is too occupied with others so that we have to wait until He is free to listen to us.

And He is above all of the corruptions that surround us here on earth. In order for us to understand more of the glory of our heavenly Father, it is good to take the Word, a passage such as **Psalm 103** or **Psalm 104** and meditate on what these passages, and many, many others tell us about the greatness and glory of God Who is our heavenly Father. We will be overwhelmed to realize that this God is not only our God, but He is our Father Who is in heaven, and that we glorify Him when we call Him "our Father," or even *my Father*. As the Lord began on this point, it is the place for us to begin. This brings us into a relationship with God that is equal to that of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you remember what the Lord said to Mary Magdalene when she tried to hold on to Him so that He would not leave her after His resurrection? Let me read His words to you. You will find them in John 20:17. This is what He said to her:

Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

So that when you and I pray, saying, "Our Father which art in heaven," we must understand that it not only means that He is the Father of all of us who know Him and love Him, but we can say "our Father" meaning that the same God Who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is our

Father too. And it is only because of our relationship to the Lord Jesus, that we have the right, the privilege, the honor above all other honors, of being able to call Him “our Father,” or “my Father.”

Concl: I am not going any farther in our text this morning. This is where I need to stop to pray and to meditate on these amazing words until the truth that they contain begins to penetrate our needy hearts. I don't believe that I am exaggerating at all to say that if we really begin to understand the truth that is in these six words, “our Father, which art in heaven,” it will revolutionize our prayers and the blessing that the Father wants us to have every time we come to Him in prayer. The fact that we can quote this prayer that our Lord taught His disciples, does not mean that we really understand it. It is only by prayer, and by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, that in our hearts we will be able to enter into the joy that our heavenly Father experiences when we come to Him in prayer and recognize that it is to “our Father” Who “is in heaven” that we are coming, and with Whom we can enjoy the sweetest fellowship.