

“The Lord’s Prayer, Part 2”
(Matthew 6:5-8)

Introduction: So far we have seen what prayer is (it is speaking to God from hearts filled with His grace), why we should pray (because it is commanded, because we have many examples especially in our Lord Jesus, because the lack of it reveals a serious spiritual problem, and because of the blessings it brings) and why it is important that we study the Lord’s Prayer (because this is the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples).

This morning, we will begin to look at how to pray, by looking at some of the preliminary things Jesus says before we get to the Lord’s Prayer. Let’s look at Matthew 6:5-8. Jesus says, “When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you. 7 And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. 8 So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.”

- I. Notice that Jesus first of all says, “When you pray.” What does He mean by this?
 - A. He means the same thing as He does when He says, “When you give alms” (v. 3).
 - a. Remember that the Lord didn’t tell us how often we are to give, or how much, when it comes to *this* kind of giving, because God causes the needs to arise according to His sovereign good pleasure. He knows in advance when and how much we need to give, but we do not.
 - b. He simply tells us that we are to love our neighbor and be ready to help when and where the need arises.
 - c. And He tells us that we should be generous in our giving, even if it means that we will need to pull our belts a bit tighter in order to do it.
 - B. Well, the same thing applies to prayer. Are there set hours for prayer? No.
 1. Does this mean that we don’t need to pray? No. We have already seen how the Lord commands us to pray. Paul, after describing the spiritual armor which God has provided for us, and which we are to put on and have in place at all times, writes, “With all prayer and petition *pray at all times* in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints” (Eph. 6:18). Prayer is essential to the Christian. Not only is it commanded, but it is the means by which we are to get the power we need to use God’s armor. It is our constant source of spiritual nourishment and encouragement. It must be used, and it must be used often.
 2. What else have we seen about prayer? It is something a Christian will automatically do. Why? It is his nature to pray, as it is the nature of a baby to cry. It is also his nature to love God. A person who loves God cannot help but spend time with Him. A prayerless Christian is a contradiction in terms. Prayer is the spiritual breath of the redeemed soul. It is an expression of love to God.

If a soul does not breathe forth in prayer to God, then it is dead, just like a physical body which doesn't breathe is also dead. Jesus tells us that the Christian loves the Lord with all his heart, mind, soul and strength. You cannot love someone as dearly as that and never speak to Him. You will pray, if you're a Christian.

3. And so does the Lord need to tell us when to pray? No. He does tell us *that* we should pray (again because we wrestle with sin), and *how* we should pray (since we are ignorant of many things), but He does not tell us *when*. If our hearts are right with the Lord, how often will we want to pray? We will want to pray to Him at all times. We will want to do what Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:18, "Pray at all times in the Spirit," and what he tells us in 1 Thes. 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." But now, how do we do this?
 - a. One way is by cultivating a constant communion with the Lord during the day. We are always to have our minds and hearts directed towards Him. We are to be thinking of Him and loving Him at all times. If you've seen the movie "Cromwell," this was what he was referring to, when he prayed just before his first battle, "Lord, Thou knowest I must be busy this day. If I forget thee, do not Thou forget me." He knew that the heat of the battle might distract him from his devotion to the Lord. He only prayed that if that happened, the Lord would not be distracted from watching over him. There are things which also distract us, but we shouldn't let them. We should keep our minds and hearts continually on Him. This is one of the surest defenses against sin and the devil.
 - b. Another way we can fulfill this is by continuing in prayer until we see an answer. There are many needs all around us. We shouldn't pray for them only once, but several times, until we see the answer to our prayers.
 - c. But the most important way we should fulfill this is by setting aside special times for prayer. The Lord doesn't set any hours, but that doesn't mean that we can't. There should be time each day in which we set aside everything else and seek His mercy and grace. There will be sometimes when we can't, but most of the time we can, and we will, if we really want to. If we don't want to, or if our desire for prayer is very weak, then we should pray that the Lord would strengthen our desire for prayer.

- II. This addresses the question of when. But Jesus also tells us something here about how – how not to pray. How are we not to pray? Jesus says we are not to pray like the hypocrites.
 - A. What do hypocrites do? They make you think they are doing something for one reason, when their true reason is really quite different.
 1. Sometimes they can do useful things, like giving to the poor. But their reason for giving is not to help the poor mainly, nor to show their love for God. Instead it is to be seen by men.
 2. The same thing can happen with prayer.
 - a. The Pharisees would stand praying in the synagogues, and even go outside and stand on the corners of the open streets and pray.
 - b. What was wrong with that? Doesn't the Lord want us to pray in places of worship? Is it always wrong to pray on street corner? No.
 - c. Again, the question needs to be asked why were they doing this? Was it to

honor God? Was it to bring glory to His name? Or was it to honor themselves. Jesus says they were doing this, "In order to be seen by men." Even something as holy as prayer can be done hypocritically.

- d. The problem was that they were doing these things to receive honor rather than to give it to God. Jesus says that when we seek after the honor of men, we may receive it, but that is all we will get.

III. But what does Jesus tell us about the right way to pray? He tells us two things this morning.

A. First He tells us that far from making a display of prayer, we are to pray in secret. "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you" (v. 6).

1. Now does Jesus mean that it is never appropriate to pray in public?

- a. No. He gives us several examples of public prayer in His Word.
 - (i) What did Jesus do for His disciples just before they left the Last Supper to go out to the Mount of Olives? He prayed for them. It was one of His most moving and powerful prayers (John 17).
 - (ii) What were the disciples doing just before the Spirit was poured out upon them at Pentecost? They were gathered together in the Upper Room for prayer (Acts 1:12-14).
 - (iii) What did Peter and John do immediately after they were released by the priests and Sadducees? They gathered together with the rest of the disciples and prayed (Acts 4).
 - (iv) What did God's people do when Herod killed James and then had Peter arrested and imprisoned? They met together for prayer.

b. What should we be doing as a congregation as we see our country falling farther and farther away from the Lord and from His truth? What should we as the people of God do to see the His glory revealed to this generation and His kingdom extended throughout the world? *We should be gathering together to pray.*

- (i) Should we be gathering only on the Lord's Day? No. We should be gathering at least weekly as a congregation to pour out our supplications to God that His kingdom would come and that His will would be done on this earth, as it is in heaven. We should be gathering *daily* as families in times of worship and prayer to do the same.
- (iii) We need to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send the Spirit of revival, to renew His church and to bring this nation to repentance. We have got to start thinking more about the Lord's glory. We think too much about what we would like to do and what we would like God to do for us. We need to put things back into their biblical perspective and ask the right question: What should I, as a servant of the Lord, be doing for my Lord and Master who redeemed me? How can I be an instrument in His hands to build up His kingdom?
- (iv) We need to gather together as a congregation for prayer. We should because it is our Lord's will, but also because it is the place of greatest blessing, for as we yield ourselves to His will, He will bless us far beyond

all we can ask or think. The way to God's blessing is not by living for ourselves and demanding that God wait on us. Rather, He blesses us as we wait upon Him.

- c. Public prayer is not discouraged, but is even commanded by the Lord.
 - (i) But we must take into account what Jesus says here: we need to realize that when we do meet for prayer, and others are present, that we pray to be heard by the Lord, and not by men, otherwise, we have our reward in full.
 - (ii) It is much better to have the Lord hear us and obtain the reward of answered prayer, than to have honor in the eyes of others because we pray so eloquently.
2. However, from this passage, what does Jesus say should be true about a majority of our prayers? Jesus reminds us here that the majority of our prayers should be in private.
- a. Jesus tells us to go into our inner room and shut the door. He wants us to find a quiet and secluded place where no one else will hear us, but God. If there is no one else around, we will be much more apt to say what is really on our mind, what is really in our heart.
 - b. And there we are to bombard the throne of grace with your worship, praise, adoration, thanksgiving and requests. We are not to pray only for what we want. We must give God what belongs to Him first. We must love Him, praise Him, and glorify Him for who He is, and thank Him for what He has done, before we do anything else. Then lay our petitions before Him. But remember that even when we are doing this, we are not to be seeking our own comfort and our own honor, but the glory of the Lord. Jesus will tell us a little further on in the Sermon on the Mount, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things [that is, all the things that you need] shall be added to you" (6:33).
 - c. And as we seek in secret to put God's honor and glory first, our Father, who sees in secret, will reward us openly. Certainly His reward is far better than anything we might gain from man.
- B. But there is one more thing Jesus tells us we should not do when we pray. What is it? We should never pray without meaning. He says, "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him" (vv. 7-8).
- 1. The words "meaningless repetition" can mean to babble, or use meaningless words, or it can mean to say the same thing over and over again, or it can mean simply to speak too long.
 - a. It appears that Jesus has in mind here prayers that are too repetitive or too long.
 - b. He says that the Gentiles, or the heathen, believe that God will hear them if they say something enough times. The Hindus have their mantras, which, when said enough times, brings about a state of altered consciousness. Those who are of the Islamic religion also have repetitious prayers.
 - c. But this isn't limited to the heathen. According to the Hebraic scholar, J. B.

Lightfoot, the Jews had a maxim, which said, “Everyone who multiplies prayer is heard” (*JFB Ages NT1:82*). The tradition also developed in Roman Catholicism that saying the Lord’s Prayer several times would earn more merit from God. This is why they incorporated it into their Rosary.

2. What are some of the ways we may be guilty of this?
 - a. Sometimes we use meaningless repetition by praying without thinking. It is very common, when we pray, to fall into using certain words or phrases all the time. Sometimes it might be because we can’t think of any other words to use. But other times it might be because we aren’t thinking. Isaac Ambrose once wrote, “Many times a musician’s fingers will run over a song which he has been used to playing, although his mind is otherwise occupied; so many in prayer will run over that form of words they have been used to speaking, though their minds are wandering about other matters. Oh, let the absurdity of this fault produce in us a loathing of it.” God isn’t interested in listening to our words, if our hearts aren’t also engaged.
 - b. Another way we might do this is by asking God for something, but using far more words than we need to. Now Jesus is not telling us that we should not pray long or often. Sometimes prayers need to be long because there are so many things to pray about. And sometimes they need to be often, because of the urgency or importance of the situation we might be faced with. But we mustn’t think that God will be more likely to hear and answer us if we use more words.
 - c. Our Father already knows what we need before we ask Him. Therefore, we don’t need to pray very long about anything.
 - d. We’re not giving Him any new information. He already knows about the situation far better than we do. He even knows what He is going to do about it. We don’t even need to give Him directions on how to solve the problem.
 - e. All He wants us to do is to bring those things to Him in prayer, so that we will recognize our inability to do anything about them, and His ability to glorify His name in them. He also wants us to come to Him so that we will give Him the praise when He answers our prayers.
 - f. But let us be encouraged that the Lord does tell us to come and pray. It is an open door of grace that He gives us. We desire as Christians to tell the Father and Jesus that we love them. Prayer opens for us a way to do it. We also want to worship and adore God for who and what He is. Again, prayer is the way in which we can. We know it would be ungrateful for us not to thank God for all of the blessings with which He blesses us. Prayer is the way to thank Him. We know how much we need help everyday to live according to God’s will. God offers us this help through prayer. We also know that we need daily need forgiveness for the many ways in which we break God’s commandments. God offers it to us, if we will come to Him through Christ in prayer. Whatever we need, the Lord holds it out to us, if we will ask and receive it by faith.