

Matthew 6:5-18 (31-Jan-2018)

Prayer

Opening Question:

Background

This section of Matthew is part of the Sermon on the Mount.

Q: In the earlier studies, Jesus uses a pattern of speaking "You've heard it said...but I tell you...". Can you remember what the context for that was?

A: *Jesus was contrasting the teaching of the pharisees with the true message of God's word. Over time, the teachers of the law had formulated many rules and regulations which might have started off as being inspired by the Law, but had become something that didn't maintain the true meaning of it.*

So one of the themes of this sermon is the way that Jesus compares the teachings and behaviours of the self-proclaimed keepers of God's laws with what God actually wants from his people.

Last study we looked at a couple of sections in chapter 6 where Jesus talked about what our attitude should be towards charitable giving.. which is?

A: *do it privately "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing"*

Jesus also cautioned against storing up treasure on earth vs. storing up treasures in heaven
And also said that we should not worry (or "fret")

Tonight's section comes between two of the passages we looked at last week, but stands on its own

Consider Luke telling of this which starts "**11** One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." So this is response to disciples. *In Jesus time Jews were expected to recite several set prayers at various times of day you can imagine they were worried about "doing it wrong"*

Someone read Matthew 6:5-8

Prayer

5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Q: What is the significance of the second word of v5 ("when")?

A: *he says **when**, not **if**.*

Q: what is significance of “do not be like them..your father knows what you need”

A: *addressing concerns that disciples might have about whether they're going to get in trouble for using the wrong words*

Q: What phrase is used here that mirrors something Jesus said in last week's study?

A: *“Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full”*

Q: What does Jesus mean by this?

A: *Same as last week: acting in a way that calls attention to your “virtue” might be a good way to have people respect and think well of you, but if that's your motivation, then it's the only reward you'll get.*

Q: What might be the advantage of praying by yourself, in secret?

A:

- *Other people being there might make us self-conscious*
- *Might be tempted to pray in a way that will “impress” other people - either subject matter or praying style.*
- *Might be difficult to pray about personal matters*
- *knowing that other people are there may affect the way we pray*
- ...

So there are some obvious problems that we can see might arise from praying in the presence of other people.

When Jesus talks about prayer, note that his description shows that prayer involves some **effort** - “go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father”. It's more than just closing your eyes and muttering under your breath. And it is interesting to notice Jesus' way of praying as reported in the gospels:

Get people to be ready to read:

- *Mark 1:35 “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”*
- *Luke 5:16 “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”*
- *Luke 6:12 “One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.”*
- *Matthew 14:23 “After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. “*

In other words, the times in the gospels when Jesus is reported as praying do seem to involve him going somewhere on his own and praying - he makes a special effort to put himself in a place that he can pray without distractions.

Q: So is Jesus telling us that it's wrong to pray in groups?

A: *Don't think he's saying that, but he is saying that there is definite value in making the effort to make prayer time special, and to avoid the distractions that might arise from praying when others are present.*

Q: Why might we think it is right to pray in the company of other believers?

A: *In the early church, the followers did pray together. Many examples in Acts - Acts 1:14 “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” and Acts 2:42 “They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer”. Acts 4:23 “3 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God.”*

Also, there are many examples in Paul's letters where he tells them how much he's praying for them. So he's not keeping his prayers secret

“Jesus isn't condemning the corporate prayer of God's people gathered together. Rather, Jesus said those that stand alone praying loudly on the street corners, or in prominent places in the synagogue or Temple, have their reward. Everybody saw them praying, but their audience wasn't God, it was those within viewing distance from them.”

Next we see how Jesus tells us we should pray. This should sound quite familiar!

Someone read Matthew 6:9-15

9 “This, then, is how you should 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 today our daily bread.
12 And forgive us our debts,
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,[a]
 but deliver us from the evil one.[b]’
14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Q: Our church, and others, use this exact form of wording at most services. Is that what Jesus intended?

A: *Maybe? But maybe it's more a guide to what the contents of our prayer should be.*

Q: Is there anything wrong with using this prayer at every service?

A: *You might just recite it without thinking what it means - might become 'babble'*

Charles Spurgeon (famous 19th Century preacher) said “It is the custom of many persons to repeat it as their morning prayer, and they think that when they have repeated these sacred words they have done enough” and

“I very much question also, whether this prayer was intended to be used by Christ's own disciples as a constant form of prayer. It seems to me that Christ gave it as a model, whereby we are to fashion all our prayers, and I think we may use it to edification, and with great sincerity and earnestness, at certain times and seasons.” and

“Let none despise this prayer; it is matchless, and if we must have forms of prayer, let us have this first, foremost, and chief; but let none think that Christ would tie his disciples to the constant and only use of this” (worth reading the sermon which is mainly about the first line of the Lord's prayer) at http://www.lords-prayer-words.com/sermon_charles_spurgeon_bible_study_father.html

Q: What is the argument for using this prayer at every service?

A: *It should remind us of what the contents of our prayers should be*

Look at the contents of the Lord's prayer?

Q: What does “Our Father in heaven” mean?

A: *God wants a relationship with us that is like a father/child. God is not in/of this world we live in but is somehow outside it, in heaven. “our” emphasises that we Christians are brothers and sisters with a common father. and “father” is a familial term - different from saying “Our Creator in heaven”*

Q: Hallowed be your name - what's that mean?

A: *Hallowed == revered, honoured, revered - God is a holy god and we should remember that His name deserves great honour and respect*

Q: Your Kingdom come - why do we pray for this?

A: *Without God we're not heading to a good place. Jesus' death means that we can look forward to being in heaven with God, which is the culmination of God's plan, so this is something we should be excited about*

Q: Your will be done - why pray for this?

A: *We are naturally opposed to God and want to do our own thing. But we know from experience and from history that this doesn't turn out well. It's God's plan and purpose that we rely on for salvation*

Q: Give us today our daily bread. What does this mean?

A: *We rely on God for sustenance. Our environment is very delicately balanced, cosmically, environmentally and socially (remember petrol tankers strike). Note this isn't “give us each day a new Porsche” - praying for the necessities, not luxuries. This is a way to recognise that we're not self-sufficient and depend on God*

Q: Forgive us our trespasses. Why pray for this every time we pray?

A: We are fallen weak creatures and should acknowledge our sin. As Christians we know there is a way that sin can be dealt with: forgiveness (unlike non-Christians who might need to suppress, obsess, repress...)

Q: As we forgive others..?

A: a sign of our genuineness is that we are willing to forgive others: they are fallen creatures just like me

Q: Lead us not into temptation - God doesn't tempt us does he?

A: No, but allows things to happen through which we may be tested and our faith strengthened. Clive likened this to being on an army selection course, where the tests might make or break a candidate, but show their true character

Q: Deliver us from the evil one?

A: It is wrong to ignore the fact that the devil rules this world and wants us to mess up. God protects us

Takeaway:

- prayer is something we should take seriously and make an effort for
- private prayer is the most effective way of strengthening our relationship with God without distraction
- prayer with other believers can be helpful and is not wrong, but we should be conscious of the limitations
- As Christians, we pray (not if, but when)
- The Lord's prayer is a template for how we should pray to God, as well as a prayer we can use