

The Messiah Has Come
Week 22
Matthew 6:5-8
“Effective Prayer” (Part 1)

Introduction

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect.

James 5:16

As we continue in our study of *The Sermon of The Mount* the focus has shifted in chapter 6 from our inward spiritual condition to the outward and visible signs of our faith. In other words, Christ changes the focus from how we are on the inside to the practical matter of living what we believe. He begins this portion with our giving, and continues with our prayer life, fasting to discern God's will, how to prioritize our wealth, and how to manage our worry and stress. These are practical matters that are a going concern (or at least they should be) for every child of God who longs to do the will of their heavenly Father.

For the next few sessions, we will concentrate our study on how to have an effective prayer life according to Jesus. If ever there was a voice to heed in regards to prayer, it is that of The Savior. For no one knows more about the subject than He, and for this reason, His own disciples came to Him and asked for His instruction, so that they too could pray as He did,

He was praying in a certain place, and when He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “LORD, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

Luke 11:1

If every Believer here today were honest and unafraid to confess their shortcomings without pretense in the company of their fellow Believers, they would admit that they have struggles in their prayer life. How do I know this? Because *ALL* of us need to learn how to pray more effectively! And we all struggle in our daily prayer life. This is very sad, for to be able to communicate with our heavenly Father is vital. Through prayer we can discern not only God's direction for us, but also have intimate fellowship with Him.

We sometimes forget that this intimate fellowship with God was the very reason we were created in the first place. When we read the creation story in the book of *Genesis*, we see in chapter 3, God walking in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day in order to commune with Adam, His own creation. It was Adam's sin that broke this fellowship with God, for a holy and righteous God can neither condone nor tolerate sinfulness. Therefore, the bond between our human spirit and the Spirit of God was severed, bringing us not only physical death, but spiritual death, as well. In short, not only does the wages of sin bring death in our physical bodies, but our *spirits*, the part of us that connected us to our Father in heaven, also died.

Christ died upon the cross to pay the penalty for our sins so that the intimate bond between God and man could be restored. With our penalty forever paid, the connection to The Father was re-opened so that our dead spirits could be restored to life again, and by faith in Christ alone could once more have fellowship with their creator.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient. We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also, BUT GOD, Who is rich in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! Ephesians 2:1-5

So what does all this really mean? It means that Jesus died... *so that you could pray!* Now, when we look at it in this light of truth, it should become obvious to us that since such a high price was paid to establish this reconnection to God, then we should all be striving to become more effective in our prayer life. Should we not? So let us look together at the teachings of our Savior and Redeemer as He explains how to be effective in our communion with our Father in Heaven. In this passage today, we will learn how to *Pray in Sincerity, Pray in Secret, and Pray in Simplicity*. Please allow me to explain.

Pray in Sincerity (vs. 5)

Whenever you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. **Matthew 6:5**

First of all, this is not a condemnation from The LORD for praying in public. We pray prayers in the presence of the congregation every Sunday. And there are plenty of examples in Scripture of a prayer said out loud in front of a large gathering. No, this is a condemnation of hypocritical praying, in order to receive the praise of men, rather than the approval of God.

The Pharisees in Jesus time on earth were masters at making sure when prayer time came (devout Jews prayed three times a day; morning, afternoon, and evening), they were surrounded by the largest crowd possible. In this, they made themselves appear more “spiritual” to the masses. It was this practice that The LORD condemned in the strongest terms. For talking to God is not a spectacle, it is meant to be an intimate conversation between a loving Father and His child.

Remember what we learned last week? The moment a third party enters into our spiritual service to God, we step over the line into hypocrisy, for we are no longer motivated by God’s approval, but rather for man’s. The Pharisees wanted people to think they were God’s favorites, but in truth, the God they claimed to worship didn’t even know them.

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father in heaven. On that day many will say to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in Your Name, drive out demons in Your Name, and do many miracles in Your Name?’ Then I will announce to them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from Me, you lawbreakers!’” **Matthew 7:21-23**

Now that, is a sobering passage of Scripture! It tells me that there are a lot of “praying” people out there, who claim to be followers of Christ, that are merely deceiving themselves. Hell will have within its borders many religious people. And that reality should drive us all to strive for sincerity. There will be no hypocrites, none who live their lives to receive the accolades of this world, in the kingdom of God. To be pure in heart is to have a heart that is solely motivated to gain the Father’s approval.

And lest we forget, we have an enemy who would love nothing more than to lure our attention away from God and have us succumb to his temptations. Most people would be shocked to think that the devil would dare to listen in on our prayers and even try to tempt us in such a sacred moment. But think of Jesus’ own temptation in the wilderness. He went there to fast and to pray, and that is when Satan showed up to try and wreck everything! He will do the same to us as well.

And just how would the devil try and break in on our prayer lives? Allow me to answer that question with another question. Have you ever been in a church service, when someone was called upon to pray, and the prayer begins innocently enough, but then it almost seems like the person praying is playing more to the crowd than to God? Let’s be honest here, we all have seen this. How does that happen exactly? As the person begins to pray, he becomes more and more aware that others are listening, so he begins to utter phrases intended to make himself appear more “spiritual” to those around him. He may start praying in “King James English”, “*We knowest that Thou art God, and can’st doeth all things...*” For you see, he just fell into the trap. He was drawn away from speaking with God in order to impress those around him. Again we hear the words of The LORD:

Whenever you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites...

To pray in sincerity is to pray only to an audience..... of **One!**

Pray in Secret (vs.6)

But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father Who is in secret. And your Father, Who sees in secret will reward you.

Matthew 6:6

Would you like for me to share a spiritual truth with you today? The better you are at praying when *no one* is listening, the better you will be able to pray when *everyone* is listening! If your focus is to develop a personal relationship with The LORD, then private prayer is a must. To be real in this world requires us to first *get real* with God. Prayer, The Spirit, and The Word are the most effective weapons in the arsenal of God's army of Believers. And you can never hope to successfully stand your ground against the enemy without knowing how to wield all three.

So do as The LORD has commanded, set aside a private place for prayer. I personally feel that every Believer should start their day with The Word and prayer. Find a quiet place in your home, shut the door and open up The Scriptures. Then pray and ask God to teach you something from them that will help you come to know Him better. For that, my friends, is the purpose of conversation; to get to know exactly Who it is that you are communicating with! So many people pray and read their *Bible* because of some sense of "duty" or obligation. But our motivation isn't just to know The Word of God, but rather to come into an intimate knowledge of The God of The Word!

If you would like to know why there are so many difficulties in the church today; so much sinful activity, gossip, divorce, depression, and anxiety, then look no further for the answer. It is because very few people in the modern day church have developed a discipline for prayer and The Word. A daily "quiet time" in the presence of God is the key to spiritual well-being. So why is it that so many who call themselves "believers" spend so little time becoming acquainted with the One Whom they claim to believe in.

The Church proper is called "the Bride of Christ" in the Scriptures. That symbolizes an intimacy. I have been married for almost forty years now. I can remember the ceremony like it was yesterday. I stood before God, a preacher (looking back on it now, he wasn't much of a preacher!), and a congregation, and made a vow to love honor and cherish my soon to be bride. So what if, after I made that promise, I got in my car by myself and drove away and left her there? Would we have truly been married, if I had not followed through with my pledge? Of course not! Stuff like that is why someone decided to come up with the term, "annulment".

I cannot stress this fact enough: Jesus died, so that you *could pray!* So, how's your prayer life? Do you schedule an intimate time with God each day to come to know Him? This next part I am not going to write down for you, but I am in real time, going to demonstrate for you how to have an effective quiet time with The LORD. And we will use *Psalms 1* as our Scripture passage.

How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway with sinners or sit in the company of mockers! Instead, his delight is in The LORD'S instruction, and he meditates on it day and night. He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams that bears its fruit in season, and its leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Psalms 1:1-3

Now, when you sit down in a private place to meet with The LORD, pray that His Spirit will teach you with His Word. And when that Word speaks to you in a specific way, then meditate on that verse (or verses) for the rest of the day. Hide that Word from God in your heart. And as you do this, you will come to know God in a more intimate way with each passing day. And as you know Him more, your prayer life improves little by little. You learn to pray so well in secret that you will know how to pray in public without being distracted by the enemy! Over and over again in this passage, Christ spoke of both our giving and our praying to be done "*in secret*". Even going so far to say that God Himself was in secret. The word He

used in the Greek (*kryptos*), means “in concealment”. It is from this word we derive the English word “*cryptic*”. The Savior is reminding us that our relationship with God is both a private and an intimate thing. No one knows us like *He does*, and He longs for us to know Him in like fashion.

We will add to this discussion in the coming days, but know this; your private prayer life is crucial in order to live as a public witness to God’s glory. Without it, the devil will sift you like wheat, destroy your testimony, and wreak havoc in your spiritual walk with The LORD. So pray. Pray in the secret place, so you can go out and face this wicked world and the enemy, who seeks to devour you as a roaring lion (**1 Peter 5:8**). And be prepared to face them in battle, clothed in the full armor of God! (**Ephesians 6:18**).

Pray at all times in The Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints. **Ephesians 6:18**

Pray in Simplicity (vs.7-8)

When you pray, don’t babble like the Gentiles, since they imagine they’ll be heard for their many words. Don’t be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask Him. **Matthew 6:7-8**

Far too many people feel that in order for God to answer a prayer, He needs to be “impressed” with the prayer. So they try and string together line upon line of poetic sounding phrases, because someone told them this is the “proper way” to pray. I doubt very seriously if you were trapped inside a burning building you would begin your prayer with, “Dear LORD, thou knowest the building doth burn...” Of course not! You’d simply call on Him for deliverance in the quickest and simplest way imaginable, seeing that time would be, in that particular instance, of the utmost importance.

I once heard a story of a young man who was called upon to pray in church. He stammered and struggled trying to find the perfect words to be impressive and poetic in his delivery until an old saint in the back row had enough and cried out, “*Son, just call Him Father and ask Him for something!*” Pretty sound advice actually. God wants to hear from you. He’s not looking for a sermon, or a hit record, He wants you, to be you, and just talk to Him! You can’t impress Him with a great speech, but you can reach Him with the simplest of requests. Again, Christ died so that you could pray! Is it any wonder He also said:

...“Leave the little children alone, and don’t try to keep them from coming to Me, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” **Matthew 19:14b**

So you see, God expects us to approach Him in child-like faith, trusting in Him to take care of our needs. Kids don’t try to impress you, when they ask for something. They just make their request known. It’s not until they are much older that they try and put a spin on things in order to sell us on them! Often when I hear people pray, they lay it on so thick that I feel like I’m trapped in a Barry Manilow song! We absolutely need to praise God when we pray (more on that in the next session), but all of us know the difference between genuine praise and fourteen carat gold lip-service. God will not be fooled by your pseudo worship. And He certainly cannot be flattered into giving you what you want.

I once heard a pastor say, “*It is no coincidence that God demands one in ten of your dollars and one in seven of your days!*” For you see, God wants you much more than He wants your offerings. So get real with Him. Pray in simplicity, for He knows what you need before you even ask. But He wants you to come to Him and make your request known, because He is a good Father Who loves to hear from His children! That, in and of itself, ought to be more than enough motivation for us to want to talk to Him. So I ask you this question once again this morning: How’s your prayer life? Christ died for you to have one, so we must honor His sacrifice by praying without ceasing, as the Apostle Paul has so eloquently said. Let us never cease to pray, in Sincerity, in Secret, and in Simplistic childlike faith.

And let the “prayer warriors” all say... Truth!!!