

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Praying Without Hypocrisy

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-8

Code: 2230

Praying Without Hypocrisy

This morning we will have the privilege of continuing our examination of the Sermon on the Mount. We've been looking at the 6th Chapter. And this morning, we find ourselves in verses 5-8, Matthew Chapter 6, verses 5-8. While you're turning to it, I must just encourage you along this line, it would be a good exercise for you and good for your soul if each week you would read the Sermon on the Mount, Chapter 5, 6, and 7 in total to prepare your heart for the message of the Lord's day. You bring so much more to it when you have prepared yourself by reading the passage. So as you read it again and again each week, I'm sure God will open up truth to you that I don't even mention in the service.

In fact, the frustrating thing about preaching, one of the frustrating things, is that you have so much more in your heart and soul and head than you could ever say, because we live by that infernal clock. But some day when we get to heaven and I have all the time in the world and in eternity, there won't be anything to say because you'll know it all and I'll be equally frustrated there too. But God bless you for coming again this morning and let's look together at Matthew Chapter 6, verses 5-8.

I want to read, beginning at verse 5, and you follow as I read. "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and at the corners of the streets that they may be seen by men. Verily I say unto you they have their reward. But thou when thou prayest enter into thy room and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret and thy Father seeth in secret shall reward thee. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions as the pagans do for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. But not ye therefore like unto them. For your Father knoweth what things you have need of before ye ask Him."

Now any time you get into any discussion of prayer, you get into a certain area of difficulty. It's hard to completely comprehend how prayer functions within the plan and the sovereignty of the mind of God. On the one hand, you have the view which says that God is sovereign and so God's going to do whatever He's going to do whether you pray or don't pray. He's going to do it and so it doesn't really matter a whole lot. Prayer isn't really that essential in determining God's actions.

On the other hand, you have the Armenian view as it's known which says that God pretty well doesn't do anything unless somebody prays. So you have both extremes. And some people believe then that prayer simply is a way of communing with God about what He's already going to do any how and

others feel that prayer is really beseeching God to do what He otherwise would never do. And it's very difficult sometimes to deal with what is the truth because there are times when we see in the Scripture that men pray and it says God, as it were, changed His mind or His direction and did something that it appeared He wouldn't do.

There are other times when God says, I'm going to do what I'm going to do anyway. And so the mystery is difficult to solve. Some time ago I was reading James Boise comments on this particular problem and he told an interesting story. He said, at one point in the course of their very influential ministries, George Whitfield who was a Calvinistic evangelist and John Wesley the Armenian Evangelist were preaching together and rooming together in the same boarding house. One evening after a particularly strenuous day the two of them returned to the boarding house exhausted and prepared for bed. When they were ready, each knelt beside the bed to pray. Whitfield, the Calvinist, prayed like this. "Lord, we thank thee for all those with whom we spoke today and we rejoice that their lives and destinies are entirely in thy hand. Honor our efforts according to thy perfect will. Amen."

After that prayer, Whitfield rose from his knees and got into bed. Wesley who had hardly gotten pass the invocation of his prayer in that length of time looked up from the side of the bed and said, "Mr. Whitfield, is this where your Calvinism leads you?" And then he put his head down and went on praying. Whitfield stayed in bed and went to sleep. About two hours later, Whitfield woke up and there was Wesley still on his knees beside the bed, sound asleep. Whitfield shook him by the shoulder and said to him, "Mr. Wesley, is this where your Armenianism leads you?"

The greatest of men could never resolve the divine mystery of how a human prayer moves an omnipotent, divine arm. And I'm not here this morning to solve the problem. But what we must know about prayer people and what we must be committed to is that when the Bible teaches principles of prayer, God expects us to be obedient. Whether or not we can fathom the mystery of how it works isn't the issue. Ours is not to reason why. Simply to obey and so as we approach Matthew 6:5-8, we hear some teaching about prayer from the lips of our Lord that is very basic to this matter of being obedient in our prayer life.

I trust that God will speak to all of us in regard to the lessons of prayer that Jesus teaches in this passage. Now let me give you some background. He is speaking on the side of a hill in the land of Israel to Jewish people. He is speaking not only to His disciples, that handful of men who had committed themselves to His cause, but He is speaking to the Pharisees and the scribes who represented the phony religious leaders of the nation. Beyond them to the crowd, the mob, the people gathered also with them.

His point in this whole sermon is to contrast true spiritual life with the false standard of the Pharisaic, Judaistic system of that time. He has already told them that their theology is inadequate in Chapter 5,

He will tell them later in Chapter 6 that their approach to the material things of life is inadequate and here in our passage, He tells them their religious life is inadequate. And He picks three illustrations out of their religious life to show them their failures, giving, praying, and fasting, which are religious activities.

As we saw last week, their giving was hypocritical. As we will see next week, their fasting was hypocritical, as we will see this week, their praying was hypocritical. They were hypocritical in their giving toward men. They were hypocritical in their fasting, which was dealing with self, and they were hypocritical in their praying which was toward God. So every dimension of their spiritual experience involved hypocrisy. They were phonies when they gave. They were phonies when they fasted and they were phonies when they prayed. And Jesus is pointing out that God's standards for His kingdom are the genuine standards of true piety, not the false standards of their Pharisaical pretense.

And so He tackles them on the matter of prayer in verses 5-8. And His idea is to strip them naked of any self-righteousness so they are literally cast on the mercy of God at which point He offers Himself as the Savior from their sin. Further, it is a good word for the disciples who have already believed, but need to be careful lest in their lives should come some of the leaven of the Pharisees. For the Lord said, "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy." Hypocrisy can find its way even into the life of one who is truly a child of the king. And all of us know well how that can happen.

Now, prayer was a major issue among the Jews. Prayer was a tremendous central factor in their religion. Just as we learned about giving last time. They were highly involved in praying. In fact, the rabbis said, "great is prayer greater than all good works." The rabbis also said, "he who prays within his house surrounds it with a wall that is stronger than iron." The rabbis regretted that they couldn't pray all day long, they wrote. Now no nation has ever had a higher ideal of prayer than Israel. No religion ever set a greater standard of prayer than the Hebrew people. They really had a priority place for prayer.

But unfortunately as we have learned in the Sermon on the Mount, in almost every dimension of their religious life as well as their theology and their mundane life as we'll learn in the future, they had created errors and false and corruptions within the divine commandments. They're giving deteriorated hypocrisy. They're praying deteriorated to hypocrisy as well. Now I want to share with you several of the faults that crept in to the prayer life of the Hebrew people. Number one, their prayer became ritualized. Their prayer became ritualized. They were functioning in their prayers only in terms of a ritual.

The ritual approach to prayer replaced the reality of a poured out heart. Now let me just give you an idea. This is not uncommon in our day. Some of you come from backgrounds where your prayers were ritualistic. Where you were part of sequential liturgy where at the right time and the right moment you said the right kind of prayer. Some of you may have been familiar with prayer books,

missiles and things like that that you were involved in. Prayer was a routine thing for you. So it's not uncommon in this day. We evangelicals, we fundamentalists, if you will, who don't like those kinds of liturgical things have our own little rituals too. Like, "Now, I lay me down to sleep," and all of those little things we teach our children and the formula that we pray before every meal and the little bones we toss at God in the name of prayer here and there that are rather meaningless.

So we all can identify with prayer as a routine, prayer as a ritual, prayer as simply an exercise with little or no meaning or significance. For example, every day if you were a Jew, in the morning and at night, you had to repeat the Shimah. Shimah comes from a Hebrew word meaning hear; to hear. And the Shimah is basically Deuteronomy 6, "Hear oh Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." And they went from Deuteronomy 6:4-9 over to Deuteronomy 11:13-21 over to Numbers 15:37-41. They took all those verses together and they made this long prayer out of it and the Jew had to pray it every morning and every night. Now you were to pray this prayer early in the morning.

In fact, the rabbi said, as soon as you could tell the difference between blue and white or blue and green, you were to pray this prayer. In other words, when the light of the sun was sufficient to make a judgment on color, you were to pray this prayer. And certainly before the third hour which would be 9:00 a.m. Then in the evening, again, you were to pray it before you couldn't tell blue from white and blue from green and certainly before 9:00 p.m.

So every morning and every night this was the routine. And by the way, if the Shimah was a little long for you, they had adapted a summary that you could pray if you were in a hurry. Secondly, they had what was known as the Shimanehesra. And the Shimanehesra was another formulized kind of prayer. The Shimanehesra means the 18 and it embodied 18 prayers for all different purposes. For example, I'll give you prayer 12. "Let thy mercy oh Lord be showed upon the upright, the humble, the elders of thy people Israel and the rest of its teachers. Be favorable to the pious strangers amongst us and to us all. Give thou a good reward to those who sincerely trust in thy name." Etc. Prayer five went like this, "Bring us back to thy law oh our Father. Bring us back oh king to thy service. Bring us back to thee by true repentance." Etc.

And they went through 18 of those. They had to do it in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening, say the Shimanehesra. Which also, by the way, had an abbreviated version if you were in a hurry. Now, wherever you were, now mark this, you had to do this. If you were walking along the road, if you were in the field, if you were in your house, if you were at the synagogue, if you were near the temple, when the time came, you needed to do this so people would be doing it at different places all through these times during the day.

It became pretty much standard fair that there was prayer at the third, the sixth, and the ninth hours. So that when those hours came, everybody sort of prayed. This is still a hold over in the Semitic world having visited in some Muhammadin countries, I've had the experience of seeing those

minaret's that rise up in the sky where a man used to stand and call everybody to prayer at the right house and wherever you were you just hit the deck and dropped into the sod and went through your prayers. Nowadays they have a timed tape recording that does the same thing. And everybody whose Muhammadin does their thing at the prescribed time. So this pretty much the routine. Prayer became a ritualized function. It ceased for the most part and for most people to be a personally meaningful communion with God.

Now in this kind of a setting, prayer could take on three forms. Number one, it could be a true honest, pure-hearted loving communion with God. I mean, if your heart was right, you could do it even though there were prescribed prayers. You could really feel the words and think them through and be involved in it with an honest heart. But most of the people weren't in that category. They fell into one of the final two. The second category was the Pharisees group. For them, these became the times when they could parade their piety. When they could show how really holy they were. So when the hour of prayer came, they put on a demonstration for everybody to see.

Now there's a third group. A lot of the people didn't pray honestly and purely from their hearts, and they didn't pray pretentiously and in a phony manner like the Pharisees, they just mumbled the thing to get it over with. Whatever it was, they just, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, muttered along, they get it over with and get on with what they were doing. So the two extremes of the sin, one was the pride involved in prayer and the other was the indifference to it. The missing of the whole point. The second thing that is a fault that crept into the Jewish prayer habit, was the development of special prayers for special occasions. They had prayers for everything. I mean, it didn't matter what it was, they wrote a prayer for it and when that thing happened, you prayed that prayer.

They had prayers for light and prayers for darkness. Prayers for fire, prayers for lightening, prayers for seeing a new moon, prayers for a comet, prayers for rain, prayers for a tempest, prayer for the sea, prayers for the lakes, the rivers, they had prayers when you received good news, they had a prayer when you received bad news. They had a prayer when you got new furniture. They had prayer when you left the city. They had prayer when you were on the road. And they had a prayer when you entered the next city. And that's just a few of the prayers they had.

They had a prayer for everything, and so your common habit was to find out what the prayer was and learn it and whenever something happened, you rattled off that prayer that was fitting for that particular event. Now, I'm sure the original intention of the rabbis was to bring everything into the presence of God to make every part of life and every act of nature and every event in the world something that drew us to God. But instead, there became a total commitment to prescribed, predigested, predeveloped prayers.

One rabbi in reaction to this said that he felt God wanted him to invent at least one new prayer every day to keep his own soul fresh. But he was going against the grain of his time. A third fault, and I've

already mentioned this, just to mention it again, was that prayer developed into something you did at certain times and apart from those times, you just didn't do it. So that it was not a way of life. Now I believe that prayer is like breathing. There aren't certain times. You don't say it's 12 o'clock, I'm going to breathe now. No, you breathe all the time. Intake and exhale and I think prayer is probably illustrated as well in terms of breathing as any illustration I know of. Prayer is the constant inhale, exhale of communion with God that goes on in the life of a believer all the time. Not to pray as to hold your breath.

But for them, prayer became something strictly set to certain hours. We see this even in the early church don't we, how that at a certain hour of prayer, Peter and John in Acts went to the temple to pray. Now, of course, in the church, these people who've come to Christ would be praying all the time as Acts tells us in Chapter 4, but they were still kind of faithful to those hours of prayer. Prayer became for most of the people a useless routine with meaning nowhere beyond some kind of an hourly function.

The Muhammidins have custom that's very much the same and there's a story that William Barclay tells about a Muhammidin who was pursuing an enemy and he was...he drew his knife out to kill his enemy and then the call to prayer came out of the minaret right when he was going to stab his enemy, he stopped, he unrolled his prayer cloth, and they do that. They have a prayer rug, a prayer mat. He knelt down and prayed through his prayer as fast as he could and then rose up and went on with killing his enemy. Now that's a fairly good illustration of the fact that prayer had absolutely no effect on anything. It was strictly a routine.

A fourth fault that crept into the Jewish prayer pattern was that they decided that it was spiritual to pray long prayers; long prayers. Now I can remember...I think some of these people who did this belonged to a church I used to go to when I was a little kid. I mean, they prayed long prayers. In fact, one guy I remember used to pray so long, I used to count how many times he said Father. And I'd make a little mark, you know, every time he'd say the word Father. He said it so many times. I guess little kids are more conscious of that than anybody. I used to count the E's in the bulletin when my dad wasn't preaching something I was interested in.

But anyway, long prayers. And you know, the Lord said in Mark 12:40, the Lord said in Mark 12:40, "For pretense, they make long prayers." Nothing wrong with a long prayer if it's a real prayer. But there's something wrong with a long prayer if you're trying to impress everybody with your verbosity and your theology and your fluency and whatever. Dr. L. D. Maxwell who was commenting on 18th Century worship in Scotland said, "The efficacy of prayer was measured by its ardor and its fluency and mostly by its length."

The rabbis used to say whenever a prayer is long, that prayer is heard. And the implication is that you've got to spend the first few minutes just getting God's attention. Long prayers, that's even come

down to today. I've heard people say oh pray it through brother, pray it through. Pray it through. Like God is behind a big wall and we've got a battering ram and we're smashing away and He's on the other side saying come on, come on. Pray it through.

We've maintained some of those same concepts. It's easy to confuse verbosity with holiness, fluency with devotion. That lead to a fifth fault in their prayers. A tendency to pick up vain repetition from pagans. You know, the pagan approach to prayer is you keep repeating yourself until the God gets so weary of hearing you that He does what you want. That's basically it. Just keep doing it and doing it and saying it and saying it until He gets so sick of hearing it, that He finally reacts. In fact, if you'll remember back in the encounter between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, he really gave them a bad time. You know, he kept egging them on. Maybe He's on a vacation. Maybe he can't hear you, better yell a little louder, he might be asleep, see. And they were going on. You know, that they prayed all day long and they kept saying oh Baal hear us. Oh Baal hear us. Oh Baal hear us. Oh Baal hear us. Hour after hour after hour, they mumbled that same phrase, trying to wake up their god. Trying to intimidate him into doing something.

And so the Jews had even picked this up and we find some old Jewish prayers where they don't...they have the name of God and before it, they put 16 adjectives, as many as they could think of, just words. They were more concerned about what they were saying and how it sounded and they were more concerned about the incantation itself than they were about the God to whom they feigned to speak. But the worst fault and the final one to mention and then to look at the text, is that they prayed to be seen by men, not heard by God. That's the major fault.

Believe me, if there is pride in the human heart, their system of prayer would really feed it. That kind of a system would feed spiritual pride so readily. Look at verse 5. It says in verse 5, they loved to pray. Now at first glance that sounds so wonderful, "for they love to pray." But the question is why do they love to pray? Do they love to pray because they love God? Do they love to pray because it ushered them into the communion of His blessed presence? Why do they love to pray? They didn't love to pray for any good reason. They loved to pray to be seen by men. And we talked about the word see, didn't we, back in the last message we gave you, and we said it's the theatomi, from which we get theatrical or theater. They wanted to be on the show. They wanted to be on the stage. Hupokritase originally meant an actor. They were an actor in a theater. They were putting on something for everybody to see how holy they were.

Now listen, that was the wrong motive and beloved, that's what Jesus wants to deal with here. The motive of our prayers. We may never unscramble all the mystery of prayer, but we can certainly deal with the issue of the motive as the Lord does here. Our prayers are not to be offered to men, but to God. Do you ever pray and pray and while you're praying in some group, you're saying in your mind, boy I bet they thought that was a good phrase? Boy, I'll bet Uncle Charlie heard that one, that'll get him. Or whoever you're particularly preaching to in your prayer.

Or perhaps you thought boy, you know, I'm coming along in my prayers. This is one of the best ones I've ever prayed. You know, it's amazing and I know this in my own life, sometimes I'll be praying in the morning service and I'll say a phrase and all of a sudden, I'll just be talking to the Lord, you know, and I kind of really shut you out and all of a sudden I'll think oh boy that was a good one. I'll bet the people enjoyed that. And that's sad, you know that? But I just want you to understand something about prayer and you need to learn this, prayer is not so sacred that Satan doesn't invade it. You want to know that? Prayer is not so sacred that Satan doesn't invade it. If I never learn anything more out of this text, you know what I learned? I learned that there's no holy ground that Satan doesn't try to get in on. You'd think that when I have my deepest devotion and when I walk into the throne room of God and when I commune with God in His holy presence that I wouldn't have sin on my heels, but I do.

Sin will dog you to throne room of God. You might as well know it. I mean, it came from there in the beginning with Lucifer and it'll track you right back. Sin pride follows us into the very presence of God. And it's so sad that it does. In those quiet moments when we would enter His presence and worship Him in purity, we find ourselves being tempted to worship ourselves. Martin Lloyd Jones has well stated it this way. We tend to think of sin as we see it in rags and in the gutters of life. We look at a drunkard poor fellow and we say there is sin. That is sin. But that is not the essence of sin.

To have a real picture and a true understanding of sin, you must look at some great saint, some unusually devout and devoted man. Look at him there on his knees in the very presence of God. Even their self is intruding itself and the temptation is for him to think about himself. To think pleasantly and pleurably about himself. And to really be worshipping himself rather than God. That, not the other, is the true picture of sin. The other is sin, of course, but there you do not see it at its acme. You do not see it in its essence. Or to put it in another form, if you really want to understand something about the nature of Satan and his activities, the thing to do is not to go to the dregs or the gutters of life. If you really want to know something about Satan, go away to that wilderness where our Lord spent 40 days and 40 nights. That's the true picture of Satan where you see him tempting the very Son of God. And I might add while He is communing with the Father.

There's no sacred ground for Satan. He invades it all. And I believe that the two greatest times of temptation Jesus ever experienced in His life leading up to His death were in the wilderness and in the Garden of Gethsemane. And both times were times when He was in solitary, isolated communion with the Father and it was there in that very private place of His communion with God in prayer that Satan invaded with temptations. As strong or stronger than any others in His life.

The lesson here people is don't think that because you have gone to the place of prayer, you have avoided the enemy. He'll be there dogging your footsteps. Sin defiles our deepest devotions and Jesus is saying to the Pharisees you may be praying, but your prayers have fallen to Satan's

temptation. Now, may I sum up these six faults and their prayers in the two statements Jesus makes. Jesus condemns their prayers on two faults. One, let's look at, verses 5 and 6, they were praying self-centered prayers; self-centered prayers. And I guess pride is always the fatal flaw and certainly it was in this case.

Look at verse 5; and the whole passage will open to you now. "And when thou prayest, thou shalt now be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and at the corners of the streets that they may be seen by men. Verily I say unto you they have their reward." Now listen, do you understand now what he means? Notice the word when. You see it in verse 5, "when thou prayest." You see it in verse 6, "when thou prayest." You see it in verse 7, "when ye pray." In other words, it's not if. The Lord assumes you'll pray. That's as normal and natural to believer as anything is.

It's not something you have to ask believers to do. It's something that they do because communing with the source of their life is a normal thing. But when you pray, He says, don't be like the hypocrites. Don't be a phony. And there can be a lot of phoniness in prayer. A lot of it. Whether it's public or private. It can be phony, insincere, less than genuine. The old commentator Uecker said, and I think it's a great statement, he said, "The greatest danger to religion is that the old self becomes religious." "The greatest danger to religion is that the old self becomes religious." It can be the phony that masks the evil heart.

Now, what is the self-centered prayer? Look at it. "Don't pray as the hypocrites," the actors on the stage. For they love to pray. Now some people say standing. Now that's the issue. They stand and pray. They're not just taking a quiet place like the tax collector in Luke 18 over in a corner, afar off, bent over, not lifting their head. They stand. But that's not the issue here. Because standing was the normal Jewish posture for prayer. In fact, the Old Testament teaches three prayer postures, kneeling. We find in Daniel 6:10 that Daniel opened his window and knelt and prayed. Lying prostrate, totally out on the ground. We find even our dear Lord doing that. But the third and perhaps as common as any of the others was to stand. Praying standing was very common. That's not the issue.

For they loved to pray standing, that would be very normal. No one would think anything of that if they were standing. The Talmud of Babylon says that sometimes the Jew would stand and pray for three hours, very common. Others say well, no, the sin here is that they love to pray standing in the synagogues. No, that's not a problem either, because the synagogue was the place where lots of people stood and prayed. Synagogue is really the forerunner of the church. It was an assembly place. It wasn't the temple. It wasn't where the sacrifices were made. It was just where people assembled to hear the reading of the law and to have it interpreted and to pray together and to worship the Lord.

And so there was common prayer in the synagogue, that was very normal and there was nothing wrong with it. There is nothing wrong with public prayer. Nothing at all, it was very much a course...a matter of course in Jewish life. And the synagogue was the normal place where the group of believers came and prayed and taught the word of God. Others say well, it was in the corners of the streets. No, that's not really a major issue either. Because if you happen to be going down the street and it was time to pray, you prayed wherever you are. So that was very normal. Jews would be praying all over the place. If they couldn't all make it to the temple at the third, sixth, ninth hour, if they couldn't get to a synagogue, if they were outside their home, if they were in the street, that's fine. They would pray wherever they were.

And they could pray standing, very silently, very unobtrusively, not even being noticed, just simply bowing the head, the quietness of the moment. They could say their prayers and no one would know. That would be a very normal course of life. That isn't the issue either. However, there is a sneaky little hint here that something's awry. Because the Lord changes the word for streets. Back in verse 2 when He talked about giving to the poor in streets, He used the word for narrow streets. Now He uses the word for wide streets. All right? Now that's a hint of something. And He doesn't just say in the streets. He says in the what? Corners of the streets. He says when you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who pray standing in the synagogues and in the widest possible intersections.

Now you're getting the picture, right? There wouldn't be anything wrong in praying at a wide intersection if you happen to be there when it was time to pray. There wouldn't be anything wrong with praying any place. You could pray in the middle of an intersection. You could pray anywhere you wanted. It doesn't...it wouldn't matter. That's not the issue. What is the issue? The issue is in order that they may be, what, seen by men. Everything else up to that point could have been all right. You get a little hint that something isn't right when you get them in the main intersections doing it.

But the point is they did it to be seen by men. And what our Lord is dealing with is this, in your prayers, make sure you're communing with God, not performing for men. You see? That's the point. Self-centered prayer to call attention to me has no place. Beloved, listen, Scripture doesn't condemn public prayer. It only condemns self-centered prayer. And you can pray a self-centered prayer in public or in private. Some people would say well, I don't pray in public. I do all my praying in private. That's just...that rings as just as phony as if you prayed in public, because it's the attitude of your heart. That's the point.

Now, they did it to be seen by men. In 2 Chronicles 6, you have a beautiful public prayer. In Nehemiah 9, a beautiful public prayer. In Acts Chapter 4, the church met together for prayers. They prayed publicly. They prayed in the synagogues. Our dear Lord prayed private prayers to God in the presence of the twelve. It tells in Luke 11. That's not abnormal. It's the attitude. And He says at the

end of verse 5, "they have their reward." What do you mean they have their reward? Well, they wanted to pray before men to get praise for men and they got it and that's it and it's a business word meaning a closed transaction that is receipted. They got their reward. God owes them nothing; nothing.

Self-centered prayer, and they are rewarded in full with human applause. But then from the false way to the true way in verse 6, how do you not pray self-centered prayer. "But thou when thou prayest enter into thy *tamieion*," it means bed chamber, closet. In fact, it was used of the place where you kept your treasures, the most private place. Where you wouldn't want to bring anyone for fear they might take something or know what you possess. The most private place you have. And when you have shut the door, make it as private as possible, then pray to your Father, who's in secret and He who sees in secret will reward you.

Do you want to be rewarded by God or by men? Do you really want men to hear your prayer or do you want God to hear? Because if you want men to hear your prayer, God doesn't hear it. You get that? People say, you know, I've been praying so long and I pray and it seems that the Lord doesn't answer. Well, maybe you're praying for display and maybe you're praying to show how prayerful you are so that others will think you're righteous rather than really talking to God. Because if you're praying for men, you have your reward. But it won't come from God. Do you understand?

If you are to be rewarded from God, then you are lost in the secrecy of a communion with God and He who is in secret and who sees the secret of your heart, binds Himself together with you. And no matter if the whole world is listening there is an intimacy in that communion that is unaffected and unself-centered. He isn't saying don't ever pray anywhere until you're locked in a closet. Listen, the closet could be the street if you were unpretentious and silent and unattracting.

On the other hand, there are some people who pray in secret says Christosum but they pray so loud that everybody down the hall hears them praying in secret. The idea is attitude. I feel my prayer life is very personal. I feel my communion with God is just that. He is in secret and He reads the secrets of my heart. You know, I'm so glad God sees in secret and I'm so glad God is in secret, because no matter what I tell God, He never tells anybody, do you know that? I can tell some things to people and even though I may say please don't pass that on, it may come back to me from another source, but I can just talk to God and I can tell Him everything there is and it's all a secret between us. I can pour out my heart and it is God who sees the secret of my heart.

God knows whether my prayer is for Him or for you. God knows whether my prayer is for the audience around me or whether it's for Him. Pray in secret. Maybe that means going into your room. Maybe that means being in your closet, but it sure means more than that. It means that if you're even in a public place praying, in the community of believers, in the assembly of the church, or while you're driving your car or at the office or walking down the hall or the corridor or the street, that

whatever communion you have with God shouldn't be a display. It should be the quiet secret communion between you and Him that knows nothing of an audience, even though the biggest audience in the world should be there.

I'll never forget one day walking down the hall of our home in La Mirada and Matthew, who was just little then, just a little fellow, five, six years old, five years old I guess, was lying on our bed in there all alone. And I heard him saying something and I didn't know what he was saying. There was no one in the room and so I just came down the hall and I stood outside the door and I heard him saying, "Dear Jesus, please come into my heart." He was saying it out loud, all by himself. He had no idea there was anybody there. And I waited until he was all done with his prayer. And then I went and we talked about what he had done at five years of age. There was something in his heart that he wanted to say to God, so he went back in a room all alone and said it.

It didn't matter that there was an audience, because he wasn't talking to the audience. That's the point. He was talking honestly to God. Daniel prayed with his windows open, but he talked to God. Jesus said the temple was the house of prayer and masses of people came there, but they were to talk to God, not to each other. In fact, Jesus even said when you pray, pray our Father and our is a plural pronoun that demands a plurality of people praying. There's nothing wrong with community praying, as long as the heart is pure.

There was a second sin that sums up the faults of their system. It isn't self-centered prayer, it is system centered prayer. And I want to just briefly mention this. System centered prayer, if you pray to God out of a pure heart in secret, the Lord will reward you. Oh what a tremendous promise that is. He pours His blessedness on those who are pure in heart as your prayers are pure so will He bless your life. And now He says, the second fault to avoid is system centered prayer. And may I hasten to add that hypocrisy is not the only sin to which Jesus speaks. The other one is the sentive indifference. One overplays prayer and the other underplays it.

One says I'll make a big deal out of prayer. The other says, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and just rattles it off; meaningless, words. And again Jesus paints a vivid contrast. Verse 7 is the false way. "When you pray, use not vain repetition." By the way, the word is bautalageo. And the first part, bauta, also comes from a verb, bautarizo. It means to stammer or to stutter. And when the Greeks spoke the Greek word wanted to speak of one who was not cultured, they used the word barbaros because all of the uncultured people with foreign languages were unintelligible to them and it sounded like all they were say was bar, bar, bar, bar, bar, bar. And so barbaros became the word for barbarian.

And so these terms bar and bauta, bar, bauta, bauta are just sort of onomatopoetic. Do you remember that word from your English classes? Onomatopoetic where the word means what it sounds like, like bzzz of a bee and so forth. Well, these are just words to indicate mumblings and

mutterings. And so He says when you pray don't mutter and mumble mindless meaningless terms like the pagans who think they will be heard for their palulagia. For their much speaking. In other words, they think that their gods are conned and intimidated and hassled into responding because of repetition. Now let me hasten to add this people, there is nothing wrong with repetition if it is right.

Paul three times prayed the same prayer for the thorn in the flesh. Listen, in Matthew 26:44, Jesus went back into the garden and the third time prayed the same prayer to the Father. In Luke 11, the man pleaded over and over again with constant repetition for his need and it was met. When it is the honest cry of a burdened heart, it is legitimate. When it is the mindless repetition of pseudo-spiritual incantations it is meaningless.

We are not conning God. Nor is it necessary for us to constantly be informing Him about things as if He didn't know. This was common practice in pagan religions, even in the New Testament it says in Acts 19 that for two hours the multitudes stood in theater and screamed "great is Diana of Ephesians, great is Diana of Ephesians, great is Diana of Ephesians." They kept saying it over and over for two solid hours. You can imagine the frenzy and the latter they were in after that. And the Jews were doing the same thing with the Shimah and the Shimanehesra. After a Muhammadin funeral, it is not uncommon for the people to gather around after the funeral and say Allah el Allah, which means god is god and repeated it 3,000 times before they leave. Buddhists have been known to put a written prayer on a wheel and turn it with a crank or let it be turned with the wind and every time the wheel turns, the god is supposed to be hearing the prayer. It's not unlike the churches even in our own country, Roman Catholic churches, where people light a candle and supposedly as long as the candle is lit, the throne of God is besought and besought and besought and besought with the same constant prayer.

Jews in Israel today, I've seen them, stand in a spot with their little black suits and their little black hats and they genuflect for hours repeating the same prayer over and over. They take that prayer, stick it in the cracks of the wailing wall and as long as it stays in the crack, it's being offered to God. As if God needed information, as if God had to badgered into responding. I've heard Roman Catholics sit down and say their Ava Marias and run through the rosary, hail mary, full of grace. Blessed art thou among women. Blessed is the fruit of the womb, Jesus. And go down to the next bead and the next one and the next one and say all their Ava Marias. And by the way, the rosary came from Buddhism. It was passed through the Muhammadins and it found it's way into Spain and thus into Christianity. It has no biblical base at all. It is nothing but bautalageo. The endless, mindless, meaningless repetition of phrases that are spiritual incantations to appease and appeal to deities that don't exist.

I've heard the paternosters which are nothing but the same thing. I've even heard the people speaking in tongues who babbled mindlessly the divine names like Jesus over and over and over until they introduce a hysteria that intensifies that babble into some supposed unknown tongue. And I've

even seen among those with whom I, myself, fellowship and perhaps I've been guilty of mumbling mindless words before meals or before bed or in the morning or for some routine prayer to open a meeting or whatever. We can all fall into the pattern of treating prayer as something to which we are indifferent just as we can be hypocritical.

I'll tell you one thing, if the Lord appeared and He said, John I want to have an appointment with you and I want you to come in and I want you to tell me what's on your heart, and the Lord was in a room and I only had a little bit of time and I went in and I said oh Lord this is a wonderful opportunity. I'll tell you one thing, I'd sure be sure to say what I want to say. I wouldn't go in there and mumble a bunch of stuff. I wouldn't say now I lay me down to sleep and all of that. And I wouldn't mutter, I would speak my heart. Listen, no less is the truth when I pray than that I enter into communion with Him. Isn't that right?

And my thoughts and my words should be precise and exact and heartfelt and passionate and bringing the real burden of my soul. Don't you treat prayer indifferently like the pagans do. Don't try to con God by turning it into some kind of incantation and don't be hypocritical. They felt they would be heard for their much speaking. They turned their minds off and just rattled it out. And if they just kept saying it and saying it and saying it, that was all that was required.

Well, in case you think that, verse 8 says, "don't be like them for your Father knows the things you have need of before you even ask." God doesn't need that. He knows what you need. You don't have to badger God. You don't have to con God. You don't have to force Him into a corner. You don't have to force Him to react just to get rid of your incessant prayer. It isn't the length of it and it isn't the repetition of it. It's the purity of it. God knows your needs. You're not badgering and beating God into submission.

So what is prayer then. If we're not informing God and if we're not really letting Him know things, what is prayer? I'll tell you what it is. Prayer more than anything else is sharing the needs and the burdens and the hungers of my heart with the God who cares. You hear? That's it. It's communion. It isn't getting things. It isn't forcing God to do something. It is just opening my soul to one who cares and that communes with me. As Luther said, "prayer is much more God instructing us than ever is it God being instructed by us." Prayer is saying oh God, I come to you with the needs of my heart, display Your glory.

Prayer is giving God occasion to manifest His power, to manifest His majesty, to manifest His might, to manifest His love and His providence and His care and His concern. God will do things and we won't be able to glorify Him if we haven't communed with Him about those things. But if we've done that and we see His hand, we know it's from Him and we give Him praise.

In conclusion, what is God asking us? What is Jesus saying? He is saying when you pray, first of all, pray with a devout heart; a devout heart. That is a pure motive seeking only the glory of God. Secondly, a humble heart seeking only the attention of God, not men. Thirdly, a confident heart knowing full well that God already knows all that you need and with childlike simplicity in faith, you simply take your heart to Him and await the majestic display of His glorious response.

And I believe if you pray in those terms, the end of verse 6 says, "He will reward you." He will reward you. You know, E. L. Moody once said, that he got so many blessings from God that one day he prayed a very short prayer. This was it, "Stop God, Amen." That was it. Too much, too much. Maybe that day would come when we might say stop God, because we're drowning in His blessing if we learn how to pray as Jesus teaches here. Let's bow together.

Father, we know that we can't begin to pray to You at all unless we know and love the Lord Jesus Christ and that's where the Pharisees were cut loose because we know Jesus said "no man comes unto the Father but by me." Their prayers never got beyond their own minds because they didn't go through the Son. Ours cannot get to you either unless we know and love the Son who is the high priest, who is our access, who gives us boldness to come before the throne of grace in time of need. And so Lord, we pray today that if there are any in our midst who do not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior that this might be the day when they come to know Him. For there is no access to You other than through Him.

All prayers are hypocritical. All prayers are meaningless mutterings of words if they're not in the name of Jesus Christ. So Father, may there be no one here without Christ. Do Your work in their hearts. For those who are Christians Lord, like the disciples gathered first at Jesus' feet may we hear the message best of all. May we avoid the pretense of prayer. Lord, whenever we have been tempted to want a reputation as people of prayer, whenever we've been tempted to want others to think we're great prayer warriors, we've already begun to take the steps of pride that lead to a human reward and forfeiture of divine blessing. May we never seek to make any impressions at all on men. May we never seek to be known as great people of prayer. May we just be people of prayer. Content that you who see in secret know our hearts.

May we Lord not even fall into that easy trap of muttering, meaningless words when we have an audience with a majestic king of the universe. May we capture the meaning and significance of such an audience and make every word count as we speak to You. Oh God, we love You, we thank you for the privilege of prayer through Christ. Amen.

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