

Sermon on the Mount Part XXI

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[0 : 0 0] This morning, we're dealing with right and wrong praying. Please turn in the Scripture to Matthew chapter 6, and we'll be looking at verses 5 through 15 in chapter 6.

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. 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. 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.

So do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray then in this way, Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name.

[1 : 3 6] Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

May I remind you that the Sermon on the Mount, including this portion that was just read, is really all about the need for righteousness and what God will accept as a righteousness that is needed in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

And I am going to dispense with giving an analysis and an explanation as to what is meant by the kingdom of heaven here, because we've covered that territory, I think, adequately in the past.

[3 : 0 3] But I do want to just offer this. When the New Testament, and particularly Matthew or any of the Gospels, refer to the kingdom of heaven, it is not the same as the dwelling place of God in heaven.

He is talking about an earthly proposition. It is heaven's kingdom come to earth. And I'll leave it with that by way of a very brief explanation.

So, this Sermon on the Mount, given very early in our Lord's ministry, is all about righteousness. In chapter 5, and verse 20 in particular, Christ made it quite clear when he addressed the crowd that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

And, of course, he took their righteousness to task because it was very hypocritical and little more than a sham. Now, in chapter 6, the Jew must possess a righteousness that not only exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, but it also is a righteousness that is set forth with a lot of negatives as to how not to achieve that righteousness, including even prayer.

I suppose there are probably some people who think that there is no wrong way to pray, but there certainly is. There is a right way and a wrong way to pray, and there are lots of prayers that are just nonsensical, that don't go anywhere, that don't do anything.

[4 : 42] So, for people who think there is no such thing as an unworthy prayer or as a prayer that doesn't get heard, that's nonsense. This passage is going to tell us in very specific terms how we are not to pray in addition to how we are to pray.

And in the very first verse, we are given a warning. Now, while it is true, the primary recipients of this sermon were those in that audience who were listening to our Lord deliver it, and we tune in on this not in a direct applicational way, but an indirect applicational way, because there are principles here that even though these are what we would say dispensationally distinct, and this is for a different people in a different place at a different time, nonetheless, there are valuable, very valuable principles that are found herein that carry over into any and every dispensation, including ours.

And I think it is most unfortunate among some dispensationalists to virtually have nothing to do with the passage of Scripture, almost as if it isn't worthy of expounding if it isn't in the Pauline corpus, or in the body of letters that the Apostle Paul wrote.

And that is a very serious injustice that is done to the Scriptures, because while not all of the Bible is to us, all of the Bible is for us.

And there are valuable principles from the Old Testament as well as the Gospels that need to be addressed by believers of any and every dispensation, including those who are generally thought of as the grace dispensation or the grace movement.

[6 : 36] I want you to note the very first word that our Lord uses in chapter 6. It is beware. That is a warning. And that implies that there is a kind of potential crisis involved.

A beware is a heads up. A beware says, Now you may be tempted in this area. I want to warn you up front about it. That's the whole meaning of the word beware.

A temptation exists. And what it is, is the natural ingrained tendency that we have to operate from the flesh.

And when we are operating from the flesh, it is a self-serving, self-seeking thing, very often that is accomplished in sight of others, so that they can see what we do, admire us, approve of us, encourage us, praise us, and all the rest.

There is just something within all of us, I think, that is akin to an approbation lust. We have this deep desire to win approval of others, their acknowledgement, their confidence, their trust, their admiration of us.

[8 : 00] We can get a great deal of mileage out of that. And to be sure, there are lots of things that believers can do that are honorable and decent and well-intended, and they do receive a certain amount of praise and notice and accolades from those watching on.

And sometimes that just can't be helped, but that must not be the motive for doing it. I don't know how many times, and I'm sure that every pastor has to deal with this, where people come up and tell him how wonderful the sermon was and how godly he is and blah, blah, blah, and on and on and on.

And if you ever fall for that, you're done. Someone has said, woe be unto the celebrity who believes their own press clippings.

So people may mean well, and they may give you accolades and praise you and recognition and all the rest, and they may do so out of a sincere sense of appreciation for what they have gained.

And I can understand that. But it was Howard Hendricks who was prophet, Dallas Seminary for probably 50 or more years. And he said, when the sermon is over, of course, the organ starts playing, the music starts playing, they've sung the closing hymn, and the pastor walks down the aisle and situates himself by the exit so all the people couldn't come out and shake his hand and tell him how much they appreciated the message and everything.

[9 : 36] And he called that the glorifying of the worm ceremony. And I thought, he has such a pretty fitting name, glorifying of the worm ceremony.

But every now and then, a preacher, especially one who is ego-bound, gets his comeuppance. And he told it this time, he had been in this church as a guest minister, and he's preaching a series of messages.

And this lady came up to him, and he was standing there and receiving everybody who came out, and they were all telling him how wonderful the message was and everything. And he said, this lady came out and she had a little seven-year-old boy with him.

And she vigorously shook his hand and gave him a big smile and said, Dr. Hendricks, I am just so, I am just so full with your message.

And he said, well, thank you, ma'am. I appreciate that. He looked down at the little boy and he said, and how about you, son? Did you enjoy the messages? Yeah, I got my belly full too.

[10 : 45] And it kind of cuts him right down to size. And that's, I think, one of the most insidious things that a pastor or public speaker has to fight against is the tendency for pride.

You start believing some of these things. And to be very honest with you, this is a principal reason why I've just done away with that back there. I mean, if you want to find me after the service, I try to make myself available because I don't want to be aloof and appear unfriendly and don't want to talk to people.

That's not it at all. But I don't want to put people in a situation where they have to praise me or say something wonderful about the message. If you appreciate the message, I get the message just by your being here.

I don't need all of the praise and accolades and everything. I don't want it because my greatest fear is I might start believing it. So don't even give me the temptation.

That's what this passage is all about. So it spoke mightily to me and it does, I think, to every preacher too. In addition to prayer and the giving, and we've already talked about the giving, how that is not to be done.

[12 : 04] And then in verse 5, he says, And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners in order to be seen by men.

Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. So in this introductory message on the subject of prayer, I just want to touch on a few very important main points and then we will develop it a little further later on.

The entire underlying rationale for prayer, when you stop and think about it, is an admission of our weakness and God's strength.

That's the whole basis for praying about anything. There is a tacit acknowledgement that the one to whom you are praying is able to do something about a situation that you aren't.

Whatever it may be. We go to God in prayer not only for thanksgiving and adoration of Him and who He is and praise and etc.

[13 : 13] but we go to God out of a sense of need. Out of a sense of a lack. And it drives us to one who can meet the need that we cannot meet.

The Jew must possess a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. And the typical thinking among many of them was that the way you practice this righteousness is by a multitude of prayers.

And to this day, I don't know if you are aware of it or not, but Jews do not pray from within themselves or from within the heart. They pray with a prayer book.

They have for years and years and years, hundreds of years. And there are other Christian denominations that do not pray apart from a prayer book.

And I, frankly, don't see the merit of that. I'm sure they do because it is ingrained in their tradition.

[14 : 25] Let me put it this way. Christians ought not to say prayers or to read prayers. If you want to read a beautiful prayer that somebody has written or spoken because it is inspiring or uplifting or something of that nature, that's all right.

That's fine. It could be just a piece of prose. And that's fine. But to say prayers in a rote, mechanical way, as though the more prayers you say, the more credit you are accumulating with God.

It doesn't work that way. But you would be surprised how many people think it does. That if you inundate heaven with your prayers about this, you are adding to your positive balance there.

And finally, when that scale has got enough prayers added on to it, it tips the balance in your favor and God says, okay, and He grants your prayer.

It doesn't work that way. Never did. So, where do we get the idea that it does? Largely from this passage here and from a misinterpretation of this passage.

[15 : 41] What Christ is introducing here is a very definite, forthright way not to pray. So, what do we do?

We take it and turn it around and make that our pattern. And we repeat it over and over and over and over again. And most people who do this don't even understand the actual content of the prayer or what it is that they're praying about.

Christ never gave what is commonly referred to as the Lord's Prayer as a rote prayer to memorize and repeat every time there's a religious occasion.

Yet, that's very often what it is used for. I know people, and you do too, would absolutely not feel like they had been at church at all unless the Lord's Prayer was repeated at least once in the service.

And the people are cued to pick up on it and they know it just by habit and by ritual. Even when the pastor is talking in a sentence, he may digress and say, and even as our Lord taught us to pray, and they all chime in, our Father who are right on cue, just like it was all planned.

[16 : 54] Well, that is precisely what our Lord told us not to do. So why then do we insist on doing it? Well, we don't insist on doing it, but there are many who do.

And the only conclusion that I can come to is, in addition to a misunderstanding, a misinterpretation of the passage, there is a tradition that is built into the heart of people.

And let me tell you, nothing dies harder than tradition. And if you're talking about religious tradition, it's even a harder death for it.

Because it is connected with God. and they are not going to be quick to abandon anything that has been connected with God over hundreds and hundreds of years.

You talk about a sacred cow, this is a sacred cow. This is the Lord's Prayer. No, it isn't. And, to the shock and dismay of many, there is no place in this passage, and there is no place in the Bible, that says this is the Lord's Prayer.

[18 : 12] If you really want to read the Lord's Prayer, read John's Gospel chapter 17. That is the Lord's Prayer. This is a model prayer.

It consists of elements that are to be included when we pray, but was never intended to be given verbatim, or repeated over and over again.

Look at the passage. Verse 7, when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetitions, meaningless repetitions, as the Gentiles do.

Who are they? They are pagans. they don't have a connection with God. They have a connection with a multiple of false deities.

And yet, they engage in multiple meaningless repetitions, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

[19 : 21] Pagans, to this day, utilize what we would call, what they call themselves, prayer wheels. And as you say this prayer, you spin a wheel and it's supposed to multiply your prayers.

Our Roman Catholic friends are sentimentally, emotionally attached to the saying of the rosary, which is the repetition of prayers. And when they do penance, they are told that the penance is a punishment thing, you know.

Someone goes to confession, and I assume that Roman Catholics still do this, and my heart goes out to them because I think their heart is in the right place, but I think they're just misguided.

And they will go to confession and say, Father, I have sinned and I have done and what is this sin, my child? And they'll say, well, I committed this or that and they are assigned a penance.

And your assignment, your punishment, is 50 Hail Marys. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed art thou and blessed is the fruit. You have to say that 50 times, and when you do that, then you've paid your debt.

[20 : 29] Then your sin is atoned for. It's gone. Because you did penance in saying the Hail Mary or the Our Father who are, and it's the repetition of this.

It has absolutely no scriptural basis at all, but there is something that comes to the heart and mind of people with a lot more power, a lot more authority than the Word of God.

And that is tradition. It just gets ingrained in people and you can't knock it out of them with a two by four. It is as if God Himself stepped down out of heaven, faced them face to face and said, this is what you are supposed to do.

That's the kind of authority that they assigned to tradition. Would to God they would give that much authority to the Scriptures and to the study of the Scriptures, but they obviously do not. And in that, we are very sad for them because they are missing out on a great deal.

Before this series concludes on the subject of prayer, and it's going to take a couple of sessions, I am going to share with you conclusions that I have come to personally after having been a Christian for almost 60 years.

[21 : 46] prayers. And what I have arrived at in my own personal life regarding prayer, and it has been a long and a tedious journey, I have had more ups and downs over the years regarding prayer than probably any other aspect of the Christian life.

I have come to a subtle conviction of what I believe it consists of. And I am not saying that I have got prayer all figured out because I still don't know very much about how God works.

Someone has said that God answers all prayers. Sometimes the answer is yes, sometimes it's no, and sometimes it's wait.

But for the believer, he answers all prayers. And I want to qualify this. I say for the believer, because to the best of my knowledge, there is only one prayer that God answers for unbelievers.

And that is, whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. And if they call for anything else, God isn't listening.

[22 : 58] I'll tell you why. Because when you become a believer in Jesus Christ, for the first time in your life, you are on praying ground.

We are told when Paul wrote to Timothy, that there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. And we are told in 1 John that Christ is our advocate.

He is our lawyer. He is our go-between. He is the one who pleads the believer's case before the Father. If you are not in Christ, you don't have a prayer.

God has no obligation to hear your prayer. prayer. He hears the prayers only that are offered through his Son, Jesus Christ, or in a desire to come to him.

That's the Romans 10 thing. Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. And only those who sense a genuine need, a lack, will ever call.

[24 : 03] And once you do, you are a believer in Christ and you are immediately on praying ground. That means that God has an ear for your prayers.

God will give due consideration to every one of your prayers. And he takes into account everything that he knows is in your future and he is able to fix the mix in a way that we cannot begin to understand.

And he does this because he is the infinite God. He is omniscient in his wisdom, omnipotent in his power, and omnipresence in his availability.

So, when you are in Christ, you are on praying ground. Now, what kind of things do we pray for? Well, most of what we pray about, let's face it, has to do with the needs of the body, doesn't it?

This surgery, that surgery, this pain, that ache, and all the rest. And the reason we do is because these things are very real to us.

[25 : 14] And if you're the one that's on the hurting end, you know how real it is. Or we pray about damaged relationships or relationships that are in danger.

We pray about kids going astray or grandkids. They break your heart and they get involved in this and that. and we pray for them. And sometimes we have multiple people praying for them.

And sometimes we think if we could just get in some kind of a prayer circle or a prayer chain, and if you get enough people praying for somebody, God has to do what you ask.

No, he doesn't. No, he doesn't. God is sovereign. He orders all things after the counsel of his own goodwill. And this is a conclusion I want to share with you.

I'll elaborate on it later, but to me it just came across as very profound and it was like one of these wake up minutes of where have I been for the last 40 years? How could I miss that? And that is this.

[26 : 12] Simple as it is. Whatever it is that's on your heart, financial need, health need, relational need, whatever it is, do you believe that God has a will regarding that matter?

Do you believe that God has a position of his own regarding your situation? That God has a preference, a desire, a thing that he sees as being best in your situation?

Can you believe that? I would trust that you can. Now I know there are things that God doesn't have a position on.

I am convinced there are things that God doesn't have a will about. I think when I got up this morning and when I decided to wear this tie as opposed to a dozen other ties, I don't think God cared a bit.

I think if he were speaking to me audibly, I think God would say, Margaret, just wear any old tie you want. Now, Marie would say, don't wear that tie with that suit, you know, or whatever.

[27 : 38] But that's different. But there are a lot of things that God doesn't have a preference about. There are a lot of things that God does have a preference about. So, whatever God's will is, wouldn't you want that?

would you actually be willing to impose your will upon God's will if you could?

Would you do that? Could you possibly be that stupid? I think not. But have you thought of it in those terms?

You know, I didn't for years and years and years. much of my prayers consisted of trying to get God to see it my way and bend my way and do it my way.

And he never was interested in that. And I couldn't understand that because how could my way be improved upon? Very simply. By his way.

[28 : 50] God has a will. God has a cause. God has a care. God has a concern. Would we override his? Let me put it this way. If God communicated to you like he did the king Hezekiah many years ago, back in the book of the kings, God told Hezekiah, Hezekiah, set your house in order, for thou shalt die and not live.

And instead of Hezekiah saying, okay, let me call my lawyer and I'll get my affairs in order to make my exit.

He didn't do that. He had a big boo-hoo. Sob, sob, sob. What have I done to deserve this? And boo-hoo. And he just carried on and carried on.

And you know what? God said, okay, Hezekiah, okay, I'm going to give you 15 more years. And by the way, they were a wretched, miserable 15 years.

But he gave in. God actually acquiesced to Hezekiah, gave him his wish. Would you want to do that? Now, there's nothing to suggest that if you do what Hezekiah did, he'll do for you what he did for Hezekiah.

[30 : 18] There's nothing to suggest that. That was just one specific instant where God acquiesced and he actually gave Hezekiah his wishes. But if something is not God's will for my life, I don't want anything to do with it.

I actually believe his way is best, even when it hurts. and for me, where the rubber really met the road, when I was holding Barbara in my arms, and she was near her last breath, married to that wonderful woman for almost 50 years, God, and I could not, I could not bring myself to say, God, I know you can do anything you want to do, and I know what the doctors have said, and I know she probably doesn't hear anything that's being said, and I know they're probably right in saying that she's already gone, it's just this machine that's keeping her life, well, when the machine was disconnected, she did continue to breathe, on her own, labored, but she breathed on her own, but I could not ask God,

I really would appreciate a miracle here, I know you can do it if you want to, and I really would praise you for doing it, would you be pleased to raise her up off this bed, to help her become well, I know what the x-ray showed, I know what the MRI said, massive bleeding in the worst possible part of the brain, I just couldn't do it, all I could say is, Lord, if you want her, she was yours before she was mine, and I would not even if I could impose my will upon yours, I want what you want, and if you want to take my life too, and you think that's best, I want whatever you think is best, I'd be glad to go with her right here and now, or in a traffic accident at the 5th and Maine tomorrow, or next week, whatever, whatever your will is,

I can't improve on that, that's what I want, can you think that way, can you pray that way, or are we going to be so immature that we're going to suggest we really know what's best in this situation, I don't know why God doesn't agree with me and get with it, isn't that arrogant, spiritual arrogance, can we not just come to him as a loving heavenly father, who knows all the ins and the outs, he knows your aches and pains, he knows your weaknesses, he knows your strengths, he knows what you're struggling with, and he can change anything he wants at any time, whatever that is, isn't that what you want, isn't that what we ought to want, if God has a will, how can it possibly be improved upon?

Job came to this conclusion, you know, after going through all of the horrendous ordeal that he did, so much of an ordeal that he became forever the world's poster boy for suffering, and he ended up by saying, though he slay me, yet will I trust him.

[34 : 09] That's what he wants. That's what I've discovered in prayer. And I'll tell you what it does, it just lets me relax and be at peace. And he just really kind of put into practice, God works all things together for good for those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.

Just leave it there. Relax, Lord, whatever comes my way, you are sufficient for it. It makes no difference. Life, death, deprivation, disease, illness, crippled, whatever.

if it's something that you're behind, I'm all for it. I wouldn't change your will, even if I could. That's, to me, the key.

thank you, Father, for this brief time spent together for this introduction to the most important subject that has perplexed and discouraged so many believers down through the years, myself included, and thank you for the conclusion that you allowed me to come to that has been so liberating for my soul and has just allowed me to enjoy life and living and you on a new plane.

And we bless you for it, and we pray that it may be the conviction of many to know that joy and that relaxation, knowing that you really are in charge, you do all things well, and your will can't be improved upon.

[35 : 45] Christ's wonderful name. Amen.