

November 21, 2021

“Praying Sincerely”
Lesson 4 of Unit

Matthew 6:5-15

Intro

Our lesson text hits the main points of today’s passage so well. Here’s what it says:

“Today’s passage is near the center of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Overall, this sermon is Jesus’ exposition of what it means to live under the reign of God, the *kingdom of heaven* as it is called in Matthew’s Gospel. Early in that sermon, Jesus had pronounced blessing on the “pure in heart” (5:8) and those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (5:6). A little later, he warned that those who belong to God’s kingdom must have righteousness greater than that of the teachers of the law and Pharisees (5:20). The middle section of Jesus’ sermon provides an explanation of those challenging ideas.

“Jesus stressed that true righteousness means righteousness not just on the outside, but on the inside. Obedience to God means not just avoiding murder, but controlling anger (5:21-24), not just avoiding adultery, but controlling lust (5:27-30). Real purity is to be pure in heart. Those who live obediently under the rule of God are obedient not just where everyone can see, but where God alone can see.

“In Matthew 6:1-18, Jesus reinforces this point by talking about three acts of devotion to God: fasting, praying, and giving to the needy. His Jewish audience understood these actions to be important parts of their obedience to God. But Jesus stresses a difference between the subjects of God’s kingdom and the religious leaders of his day in the way that they perform these acts of devotion. Our text is in the middle part of this discussion, and the longest part of it.”

Read Matthew 6:5-15

1. vs. 5: The word “hypocrite” comes from the word for “actor”

In other words, a person who is pretending to be something he is not—a hypocrite
Jesus uses the word to describe the religious leaders of the time
They seem to be devoted to God, but they aren’t
They want people’s attention and approval
Jesus says they “want to be seen by men”
Jesus says they have the reward they sought
They wanted human approval, and they got it—nothing more will come to them
Jesus isn’t speaking against public prayer—He himself prayed publicly many times
He is against those who pray to gain attention, to show how spiritually “great” they are
In vs. 6, Jesus will explain what true prayer is

2. vs. 6: Jesus says to be alone with God, to talk to God rather than be heard by people

He uses the example of going to a private place to pray
It’s a metaphor for being alone with God, not seeking a crowd to hear you
Only you and God

The reward mentioned here isn't like a prize for winning a contest
Jesus isn't telling people, "Pray to God, and He'll give you a prize!"
He's reminding people that God is a Heavenly Father
 He loves and cares for His children
 He will give His children what they need at the time they need it
God will reward faithful lives when we get to heaven
 What those rewards will be is almost impossible to say
 A thought here is that God will reward those who pray (talk to God) in humility
 This reward is a part of reward for serving the Master as He calls us to

3. vs. 7: His next teaching on prayer is about what gets said

 He starts with the negative example
 "Don't pray like the pagans"
 They pray a lot of words, believing that more words = more attention from God
 This is like the event with the prophets of Baal and Elijah
 Baal didn't respond, so Elijah tells them to do it again, and louder
 These "gods" are formed just like people: fickle, changeable, moody
 The "babbling" suggests praying the same thing over and over to get God to hear
 This is how **not** to pray, says Jesus

4. vs. 8: Here is the reason why we don't need to pray the same way the pagans do

 "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him."
 The pagan gods had to be begged to listen and to answer
 The God of heaven already knows everything
 When we pray, we aren't telling Him anything He doesn't already know
 We pray in this way to show we recognize our place before Him
 We honor Him as our Father who loves us
 We show that we are depending on Him for our needs, and not on ourselves
 We act in humility by asking Him for help
 We might pray for the same thing persistently
 The parable of the widow in Luke 18 teaches that persistence in prayer is good
 We aren't trying to "bend God's ear" in prayer, to get Him to do our will
 We are coming to Him repeatedly with our needs (which He already knows!)

5. vs. 9: Jesus offers a model of prayer in vs. 9-13

 He says, "This, then is how you should pray"
 He's showing the contrast between the pagan way of multiple empty words said
 repeatedly, and the way God wants His followers to talk with Him
 This prayer model uses the same point as in vs. 8
 God is a good Father who gives His children what they need
 "Our Father in heaven"...
 "Hallowed be Your name"
 Hallowed means to treat as holy or sacred
 We are to treat God's name as holy and sacred at all times
 This is especially true when we are talking to Him

6. vs. 10: “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven”
In God’s kingdom, what God wants will be done by all in His kingdom
In Heaven is will is already being done
We, the subjects of His spiritual kingdom, want the same thing
Our greatest desire should be that God’s will is done here as it is there
This prayer of His will begins with us letting God rule over us as King
7. vs. 11: The first half of the prayer (vs. 9-10) is for God’s will to be done, in us and the world
The second half begins with a request for God to provide for our needs
“Give us today our daily bread”
During the exodus, God provided manna and then quail daily
The lesson was that God provided their needs, each day
We are to look to Him daily to meet our needs, in this case, physical ones
We live in a time when most have full cupboard, freezers, and refrigerators
We are prepared for several weeks, not just for today
We are called to daily place our dependence on God’s providing hand, not our own
8. vs. 12: This verse is the second request for God to meet a need in our lives
“Forgive us our debts”
We are in the Kingdom because we have been forgiven
It is this forgiveness through Christ’s blood that gives us access to the kingdom
We don’t usually think of our sins as “debts”
Forgiving a debt has a cost
Good way to think to our sins, of the cost that was paid to forgive them
Realizing this cost compels us to act toward others in the same way
Some people are “in debt” to us as far as sins go
They have treated us poorly, said something untrue or unkind about us
They “owe” us
If God forgiving us doesn’t move us to act in the same way toward others, there is something wrong or missing in our spiritual hearts
9. vs. 13: Here is the third request for a need to be met
“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”
This phrase “lead us not into” means “protect us from”
God is never going to lead anyone into a trial or temptation (see James 1:13)
This is a request for God to give us help in overcoming temptations in our lives

“Deliver us from the evil one”
We know Satan is active and seeking to hurt those who follow Christ
We have to be aware of his methods and schemes (Eph. 6:11)
We also know that Satan is no match for God! (John 17:15, 2 Thess. 3:3)
We have authority in Jesus’ name to make Satan leave us (James 4:7)

10. vs. 14: Jesus ends this section with two verses about forgiveness

He has been talking about prayer, and how kingdom followers should pray

He concludes by talking about forgiveness

“If you forgive...Your heavenly Father will also forgive you”

Jesus emphasizes this point

We have been forgiven by God

For that reason, we must also forgive others

If our hearts truly understand how much we've been forgiven, we will be able and
desire to truly forgive others

Extending forgiveness to others isn't always easy

It is frequently a struggle, and challenging

We are called to continue seeking God's ways, thus to seek to forgive others

Eph. 4:32 says, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as
God in Christ forgave you.”

Col. 3:13 says, “...bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a
complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.”

11. vs. 15: This verse contains a warning

If we don't forgive others, God will not forgive us

Matt. 18:21-35 is the story of the man forgiven a huge debt who won't forgive another for
a much smaller debt. The master who forgave the first man hears of this
and takes back the debt forgiveness he had early given. This is the same
warning Jesus gives in this verse.

The reality is that even when we forgive others, we don't always do it perfectly.

This doesn't mean we have lost our forgiveness from God

It does remind us of how much we rely on God's forgiveness each day, each moment

That reminder calls us to grow in forgiveness to and for others

Application: As with the intro, our text summarizes this passage very well.

“Jesus' teaching shows us how we can assess our prayer life. We need to acknowledge
God as our king and our Father, who loves us and gives us what we need. In that light, we need to be
completely honest before Him, concerned about His will and power, not our own standing with others.
Moment by moment we need to rely on Him to provide what we need for life and for spiritual wholeness.

“When we close our eyes in prayer, we remind ourselves that we stand before God alone.
But when we open them again, we see other people. As we ask God confidently to forgive us, we realize
that we are compelled to forgive others. We do not pray to be seen by other people, but if we do not treat
other people differently because of our prayer, then we have not prayed at all.

Prayer: Father God, please rule in our lives as well as over the whole world. Strengthen our desire and our
actions to forgive others just as you have forgiven us. In the name of Jesus, who taught us how to pray,
Amen.

