*Introduction*

We saw last week that Jesus in this chapter is teaching how we should conduct ourselves in our Christian lives in terms of giving, praying and fasting. We looked at giving last week, so now we come to the Christian's prayer life.

Jesus starts off the subject of prayer in exactly the same way as he did with giving alms -

***5.......do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.***

When we read this portion of scripture about prayer, we can easily miss the point by thinking this is teaching us how to pray and what to pray for.

In fact, often that is all this passage means to us, the Lords prayer which we recite on various occasions, and I am not saying it is wrong to do that.

We have seen on previous weeks how Jesus condemned the righteousness of the Pharisees and Scribes and how our righteousness must be so much better than theirs.

Hence, Jesus teaches us how to live our lives right in the eyes of God our Father, and therefore righteously.

If we look at the life of the Pharisee, it is all about ME.

I want to be seen giving, I want to be seen and heard praying, I want to be seen to be fasting.....Me , Me, Me.

Jesus condemned them for their hypocrisy .

In Matthew 23 we see the 7 woes of their hypocracy.

Later in the Gospels, Jesus highlighted the various practices that they performed by the telling of parables

***Luke 18:9To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: “God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. 12I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.”***

***13‘But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”***

***14‘I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.’***

The overall theme of this chapter and what Christ is teaching us is this - SIN.

Jesus shows us here, and in the verses that follow that Sin is not something that we do when we are far from God, as if we were in another country as it were, Sin is something so terrible, so invasive, that it will follow us to the gates of heaven, and, if it were possible, into heaven itself.

Indeed, before Adam and Eve were disobedient, when they fell. There had already been another falling, in heaven itself. Satan was a perfect, bright, angelic being, an Arch Angel in fact in heaven itself, who fell into sin.

This is what Jesus is teaching, he is showing us that sin is not just about the doing of 'actions', and if we think that sin is just about actions, we do not understand sin at all.

The biblical teaching on sin is that it is essentially a state of the heart.

We could sum up sin as ultimately self-worship and self-adulation and Jesus is showing us that when we do our acts before men, when we pray on the street corners to be seen, we are gratifying ourselves, we are sinning, and this sin follows us into the very presence of God.

Sometimes we can persuade ourselves that we are worshipping God, when we are actually worshipping ourselves and nothing more.

The Pharisees were experts on self-worship.

When we meet together to worship, are we here to have a good time, sing the songs we enjoy, then our focus is not where it should be, we have come to worship God.

So then Jesus tells us how we are to pray, and the first thing he says is this:

***6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.***

also remember that before I was married and at my first Church about 12 miles from here, there was a man who lived 2 doors away from me who I would call a modern day Pharisee, he used to sit at his table in the window, and have his bible open and look very pious. He would bow his head and be praying. But he wanted to be seen by the passers by, and for people to say good things about him.

Jesus says this is all wrong, the approach to prayer was wrong and the babbling of words was wrong, because its focus was not on the Father, but themselves.

*So how are we to pray?*

Our heavenly Father wants you to focus on Him, so go into a room and shut the door. Shut out all the distractions, the hustle and bustle of life and concentrate on Him.

Remember that we are in the presence of Almighty God, the one that to Jeremiah said:

***Jeremiah 1:4The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 5‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew[***[***a***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah+1:4-6&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-18952a)***] you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.’***

When we pray, we are approaching God. Its very important to realise this. Remembering this will make everything else right.

The purpose of going into the closet and shutting the door is in order that we shut out certain things - it is not saying that we should not have prayer meetings.

It is not necessarily a physical closet or door, its something we can do walking down the street, while doing the washing up etc.

Its about shutting out other people and shutting out and forgetting yourself. The idea being portrayed is that we are on our own in communion with God and nobody else knows what we are doing.

The Psalmist states:

***Psalm 86:11Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. 12I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name for ever.***

Having excluded those things, so that we can concentrate fully on Him, we have to then realise we are now in the presence of God himself.

Before we start to utter words, we must have a realisation of who God is and what God is.

We need to realise that we are coming into the presence of the Almighty, the absolute, the eternal and great God with all His power and His might and His majesty, that God who is a consuming fire, that God who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all. The absolute Holy God.

Having realised this we come to one who sees what is done in secret and who rewards openly.

The relationship is one of Father and child and ***".8..your Father knows what you need before you ask him.***

Just as an earthy parent knows what their child needs, and cares for the child, and looks at the child and anticipates the need of that child, so our Heavenly Father knows all about us. He knows our every need, he is concerned for us and wants to bless us.

So we must exclude, then realise, then we are to come in confidence.

Paul says

***Eph 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,***

We are to come with a child-like faith, with the self confidence of a child.

We need to have an assurance that God is truly our heavenly father and therefore knows without a shadow of a doubt exactly what we need at any given time.

There is no need to keep coming day after day, repeating the same thing in order that we will wear Him down, yet God likes us to show our keenness, our anxiety and our desire over a thing, we are told to

***Matt 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.***

***1 Thessalonians 5:17pray continually,***

But not mechanically repeating..

*Then Jesus tells us how to pray.*

The first half of that which we call the Lords prayer is all about our desire for God and his kingdom.

***Matt 6:9‘“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10your kingdom come, your will be done,  on earth as it is in heaven.***

This part of the prayer is all about what we have been speaking, its putting God first, it is realising who he is and wanting His will and His Kingdom to reign.

The second part of the prayer deals with ourselves:

***11Give us today our daily bread. 12And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”***

The Apostle Paul in the final chapter of his letter to the Philippians states this:

***Phil 4:11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.***

Paul trusts in His Heavenly Father to give him what he needs, and so in times of plenty or in need, he knows that God will always supply him and he is able to do all things in his strength. And then goes on to say:

***19 And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.***

God will not let us down.

Jesus ends this section on prayer with the following:

***Matt 6:14For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.***

Now this is a grave warning, and not to be treated lightly. We can only be forgiven, if we forgive others. So, if you are holding on to something that someone has done to you, there is a need to forgive them, other wise God will not forgive you for your sins.

*Conclusion*

We could spend weeks on this chapter alone, but we shall not. But what Jeus says about the way we do things, the way we live is important to know, understand and put into practice.

Let us remember that when we come to prayer we are to:

1. Exclude - others, things and ourselves, so that we can concentrate on Him alone.

2. Realise - that we are coming into the very presence of Almighty God, the creator and sustainer of all things, remember His Majesty and power.

3. Confidence - we can come with confidence because it is a Father and child relationship we have through Jesus Christ.

***Heb 4:16 Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.***

God wants to answer, God wants to bless, God wants to forgive, God has a plan for your life, He has great things in store for you.

We don't need to come with lots of words and constant repetitions, although he wants us to ask at the same time, He wants to see how keen we are.

Our God, our Heavenly Father wants to bless you.

But remember your part - you have to forgive those who have hurt you.

Don't do to be seen, secretly do and He will see, and reward you openly.

Amen.