

# Jesus law and kingdom - Prayer

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Date: 27 May 2018

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[0:00] It's a lovely hot day today. Has everybody been taking advantage of the weather?! Yeah? Yeah? Lucky you. Okay, so we're going to be looking at Matthew 6.

! If you'd like to have your Bibles open, Matthew 6. Success.

Success. Okay, so if you were here last week, in the evening, you'll know that Ben did a cracking job of providing an overview of verses 1 to 18.

We're going to be looking back at this, but tonight we're really going to be focusing on verses 5 to 15 and the subject of prayer.

Firstly, we're going to do a recap on the context. And we'll look at, try and keep it brief, but we'll look at the places that are involved, the people that are involved, and try and build a picture of where we are in the text.

[1:22] Then we'll go into the verses 5 to 15 a bit deeper, and we'll try and answer some important questions about praying. So, questions like, what is prayer?

Who are we praying to? How do we pray? And why are we praying? Okay, so looking at the context, this is tonight's part 6 of a series which is focused on the Sermon on the Mount.

And the events in this chapter take place in Galilee. And in the latter half of chapter 4, we saw Jesus traveling throughout Galilee doing amazing things.

So from verse 23, chapter 4, Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed.

[2:33] And he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed him. So these weren't amazing things like we'd see on TV.

My mind is drawn towards the amazing never-stick frying pan that you see in supermarkets and on the infomercials, as Americans say.

So that's a myth. I can confirm that. I killed mine with bacon. So it wasn't cheap, amazing things. As we read, these were genuine, amazing things.

Jesus wasn't a figure like Paul Daniels or Derren Brown, as the atheists might have you believe.

Some atheists might have you believe, I should say. I just realized that actually some of you probably don't know who Paul Daniels is.

It's the younger people. I apologize. Speak to me afterwards. So the paralyzed were brought to him, and he healed them. Jesus, not Paul Daniels.

[3:41] And to give you some idea of the scale of attention he was getting, people weren't just swinging by from neighboring towns. This is an area, if I've got my geography right, it's an area roughly the size of the UK.

And in a time where there's no trains, where you pretty much had to walk everywhere, this is quite an amazing thing. And really, if we think about it in today's terms, it would be an amazing thing anyway.

So in Matthew 5, Jesus saw these huge crowds, and he went up on a mountainside with his disciples, and he began to teach them.

And it's here that Jesus starts making a distinction between two groups of people, with a focus on one in particular. He starts in verse 3 of chapter 5 by highlighting the characteristics of people that belong to the kingdom of heaven.

People that mourn. People who are meek. People who are merciful. People who are pure in heart. People who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

[4:53] And as the chapter rolls down, Jesus goes into detail how these people should behave in the laws of that kingdom. As we heard from Steve a few weeks back, there's a criteria to meet if you want to be a citizen of the kingdom.

Jesus draws a definite line in verse 20, where it's made clear that there are a people that fall outside of the kingdom.

And he points towards the religious leaders of the day, and he says, this isn't enough. Which is really counterintuitive to the people of the time, very unexpected.

We also learned that a crucial part of this citizenship is the heart. You can't just act meek and merciful. What's going on in the heart is crucial.

Bless you. Chapter 5, verse 28 points to this directly by saying that actually the act of adultery is already done if your heart is willing it.

[6:09] So we're building a good picture of what a citizen of heaven looks like. Temperament, heart, behavior. And this really brings into focus the things we need for chapter 6.

Because this chapter continues with this theme of not just how we relate to other people, now how we relate to God. And this is something we must, absolutely must get right.

So no sleeping. I'm not looking at anybody in particular. So verse 1 sets up a couple of things that we need to keep in mind as we go on through the text.

And I want you to notice the immediate warning. Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them.

If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So on Sunday, Ben was touching on how prominent choices are through the book of Matthew.

[7:13] And we see it here straight away, don't we? There's a choice to be made. You can be seen by people or be rewarded by God, the Father.

I want you to notice how being seen by God isn't an option. This isn't a trivial choice either.

It's not the kind of relationship that is like a colleague boss kind of thing. That's not what we're talking about. Look at the text. It says, this is your heavenly Father.

And when there is a father, there are children. So we're going to take a detour here very briefly and just explore this a little bit. In John 1, from verse 1, the text says this of Jesus.

He came to his own and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

[8:18] Which is pretty mind-boggling, isn't it? If you receive Jesus, then you are brought into this close relationship with God himself. And back at the Sermon on the Mount, this is already happening with Jesus' disciples.

This directly affects the way that we communicate. Because the closer you are to someone, the more open you can be with them.

And the stronger the connection. So as children of God, there are ways to carry ourselves. There are ways to behave and ways not to behave. In verse 2, Jesus elaborates on verse 1 with a descriptive example.

Thus, when you give to the needy, sell no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

It is a hypocritical thing to do, isn't it? If you are helping yourself, you are not really helping other people.

[9:34] If you have got yourself in mind first, then really, you are there to help yourself. And there is no need. I don't ever see a need to let everyone know what you are doing when you are trying to help somebody.

In verse 3, there is a picture of the left hand and the right hand. I think that is a picture of closeness. Since they often work in unison.

They are so close together. So this has to be a private thing between you and your father. Your left hand, I don't know what your right hand is doing. Actually, it reminds me of one of, some of you know, I am a big Metallica fan.

It reminds me of one of their music videos. They have got a song called Nothing Else Matters. And it is a very slow, very melodic, soft rock piece.

And the video is very kind of nostalgic. It is all in slow motion. And there is pictures of them in the studio and recording and playing pool and doing really nice things.

[10:48] And it is really quite a nice video. Until you get about half way through where there is this shot of the guitarist handing money to, let's just say a charitable cause.

And it is completely out of place. And it really bothers me. It has bothered me for many years. Why? Why? There is no reason for it other than for themselves. That was 30 years ago, that video, I am ashamed to say.

But I think it reinforces my point, how much that sticks in the mind. Anyway, whatever you do, it won't go unnoticed.

Verse 4 says, Verse 4 says, your father who sees in secret will reward you. God the father sees it all. Like I said about verse 1, it's not optional.

[11:59] There's no opt out or any privacy laws that will intervene and stop God from seeing what you're up to.

Jesus says a bit further on in Matthew, and if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.

Our heart has to be focused on this intimacy between ourselves and God. And even something we might consider to be trivial, God will notice.

So we're not just citizens of heaven, are we?

We're also children of the Most High, who should be living our lives daily, being motivated for him and not for other people. Now that was quite an extensive introduction.

[13:13] This brings us to prayer quite nicely. The main part of the text from verse 5. That's probably one of the most recognized and recited parts of the Bible. The Lord's Prayer.

What is meant by prayer exactly? Okay, and we're going to detour just quickly and look at some key points. In Jeremiah 33.3, it's written, This is what the Lord says, He who made the earth, the Lord who formed it and established it, the Lord is his name, call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things that you do not know.

Prayer is our communication with God. God himself tells us to pray to him. And he listens. It's right there in the text. God says, He will answer you.

Not even just vague answers, but answers of wisdom that's way beyond regular human wisdom.

We've all got that one friend, haven't we, where you can take a problem to and they somehow manage to come up with the most complicated solution known to man and you try and execute it and it all goes pear-shaped and you end up in a worse situation than you started with.

And that's the difference, I think, between the wisdom of man and the wisdom of God. And that was me before I knew God.

[14:53] I went just about anywhere for wisdom and for answers and tried to adjust my life accordingly. I always ended up back in the same place. I think that's true for many people.

People wonder, why does this keep happening to me? Why am I still here? Why haven't things changed? Why haven't things changed? Why haven't things changed?

When we're in communication with God, it's important to remember we're talking to the creator of the heavens and the earth. The God that spoke everything into existence.

Can God help you with your day? Of course he can. He made it. Anything alternative is pretty much a waste of time.

Isaiah 46.5 says, To whom would you liken me and make me equal and compare me that we would be alike? Those who lavish gold from the purse and weigh silver on the scale hire a goldsmith and he makes it into a god.

[16:03] They bow down. Indeed, they worship it. They lift it upon the shoulder and carry it. They set it in its place and it stands there. It does not move from its place.

Though one may cry to it, it cannot answer. It cannot deliver him from his distress. There's no competition. Who else would you go to when you can go to the source of all life?

So this outlines what prayer is and who we are praying to. Prayer is a direct communication with the sovereign God, the creator of heaven and earth.

So let's look at what Jesus says about this. So going back to verse 5. And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites.

For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners that they might be seen by others. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your father who is in secret.

[17:08] And your father who sees in secret will reward you. It's much like we've seen in previous examples.

We have an example of what not to do. Verse 5. And then we have an example of what we should be doing. Verse 6. It's the same dynamic as we've seen before.

The communication that takes place between you and God is a matter of the heart. It's an intimate moment. I think there's an element here of shutting the door to keep things out that shouldn't be present when you're communicating with the holy God.

And I think everybody should have that space where they can be alone with God. For me, I love the space right before I'm working out. I can go into my room.

I can lock my door. I can think of all the burdens of the day. I can lift them up to the Lord. I can think of my friends. I can lift them up to the Lord. I can be thankful for things and pray for protection in my workout and all of these things.

[18:19] It's a nice, quiet space. For me, the other bonus of shutting the door is that it keeps the cat out. I like him.

I'll just emphasize that. I do like him. I don't want to drop weights on him. Verse 7.

And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think they will be heard for their many words. Not something I mention an awful lot, but a long time before I was a Christian, I was involved somewhat in witchcraft and a lot of witchcraft, a lot of practices involving repetition.

The more you repeat something, the more powerful it is, supposedly. When I hear this verse, I also think of the Islamic call to prayer.

I don't know if anybody knows much about this. I don't really know that much about it myself, but what I do know is that when translated, each sentence is repeated at least twice.

[19:39] One of the sentences is repeated something like six times. The God who created the heavens and the earth by speaking them into existence isn't hard of hearing.

He hears and he sees everything. Jesus says in the next verse, do not be like the... The Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Such is the wisdom of the true God. Jesus continues on to give us a framework for prayer and it's often called the model prayer. We'll look at the structure of this a little bit later, but for now we'll go through the verses one at a time.

Our Father in Heaven. Notice what Jesus is doing right off the bat. He's grouping his people together. Our Father.

This is for the children of God. This is a family thing. There could be no argument as to which father Jesus is talking about because he references the kingdom in heaven that is above, beyond the earth.

[21:00] Hallowed be your name. I think a little while ago I did a sermon on this and exactly what hallowed means and I'll outline it very quickly here.

It means to be set as holy. In a similar way to how we shut some things out when we pray his name must be set apart.

In Isaiah 57:15 it says this, for this is what the high and exalted one says he who lives forever whose name is holy.

I live in a high and holy place but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit to revive the spirit of the lowly and revive the heart of the contrite.

His name is holy. Holy. I believe this text gives us a phenomenal reason why it's important to set apart God's name as holy.

[22:10] The highest holy and exalted one comes to meet the lowly in spirit individually and revives our hearts. It's no wonder then we go on to read your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus is telling us it needs to be on our hearts and why wouldn't it be? We just read about the true wisdom that God has.

The creator wants to commune with you. As we read he knows everything you need. He wants to revive you and be with you.

I say definitely count me in on that. Lord Jesus I want that. Give us this day our daily bread.

Interestingly the word that's used for daily here in Greek isn't used anywhere else in scripture. And it's thought to mean what is necessary for the day.

[23:19] So an alternative way of thinking about this might be to say sustain us Lord. In Matthew 7 Jesus says what father among you if his son asks for a fish will give him a snake instead or if he asks for an egg will give him a scorpion.

So if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.

Your Holy Father will sustain you not just physically more crucially spiritually. But it has to be the relationship. You have to ask him you have to speak to him.

And forgive us our debts as we also are forgiven our debtors. excuse me. Again going back to our hearts do we have merciful hearts?

We read in chapter 5 blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy. verse 13 lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil or the evil one.

[24:53] Some translations have it. We live in a fallen world and temptation and trial is absolutely everywhere especially somewhere like Brighton.

My bus journey home from work every day sometimes takes an hour and a half and I can tell you I've seen just about everything in just a few weeks in that hour and a half.

Most of it not pretty and not as often as I should maybe but the prayer for me is that I get through that journey okay.

Spiritually and physically. John 17 says I do not ask that you take them out of the world but you keep them from the evil one.

This is Jesus' prayer for the protection of his disciples and in verse 20 he says my prayer is not for them alone. Jesus goes on to pray for all believers.

[26:02] In Matthew 13 19 Jesus explains the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it the evil one comes and snatches it away snatches away what has been sown in his heart.

This is what was sown along the path. Ultimately the evil one Satan the serpent or the devil all in the same same entity.

ultimately he wants to keep you out of God's kingdom. We can't let that happen.

We need to continually pray for each other pray together. Jesus goes on to explain the dynamic of forgiveness. For if you forgive others their trespasses your heavenly father will also forgive you but if you do not forgive others their trespasses neither will your father forgive your trespasses.

I don't think Jesus is saying here that there's a definitive action that is done once that will keep you from the mercy of the father. Again it all points back to the heart.

[27:16] if you have an ongoing heart which is reluctant to show mercy or forgiveness don't expect to be favoured by God.

You have your reward that's what the text says. So if we're to recap the structure of the Lord's prayer you could say it has two halves.

The first half of reverence and a second half of requests which is right isn't it? Because it's God that we need to put first. That's where our hearts need to be.

So how do we piece all of this together? There's a lot of information here. I'm sorry for bombarding you with all of it. It's all very relevant. Look at the individual pieces that we've got so far.

We know that God is our holy father. We know that we're children of God. We know that prayer is to commune with God our holy father.

[28:24] We know the heart must be changed. So is that it? Case closed. Not quite. Because there's one more thing we have to consider and that's John 14 6 where Jesus says I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the father except through me. Let's go back to what we were talking about earlier. There is a price for sin. Romans 6 23 says that the wages of sin is death.

What happens when you can't pay a price? You accumulate debt. That's not a debt that we want to pay. Thankfully we don't have to.

We continue in that verse Romans 6 we read for the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. And through Jesus God changes our hearts by the Holy Spirit. See how all these things are coming together now and connect. It says in Romans 8 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

[29:55] Hallelujah. Which really just leaves one unanswered question from what we've been looking at. I don't know if anybody picked up on it. What do we keep reading about rewards?

That was my first thought when I read the text through a few times. What if we've examined it properly and we see exactly who God is?

We already have our answer. Ephesians 1, 3 to 10 puts it rather nicely and I glad that Ben drew on that.

Blessed be the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him.

In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the beloved.

[31:05] In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

That's quite a mouthful, isn't it? But really there's no uncertainty. Our reward is Christ. Our reward is the very thing that God is telling us to be, citizens of heaven.

Our reward is the forgiveness of sins. Our reward is redemption through his blood. Our reward is God's will being done, being united in Christ.

Christ. So my question tonight is, who are you going to choose?

As a church, as a body, we each have a different part to play. And I think in each of these things that we do, each time we do them, it's an ongoing thing, we've really got to challenge ourselves and say, who are we really doing it for?

[32:33] And if you're listening tonight and you don't know who Christ is, I'll simply say this, your debt has already been paid. Go to Christ and claim your reward.

Be part of the kingdom. Amen. Amen.