

Mathew 6 v 7

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[0 : 00] And let's turn back to the chapter we read in Matthew chapter 6. And they're well-known words, but just to consider the section from verse 5 through to verse 13, where we find that Jesus is here telling us how we shouldn't pray and how we should pray.

I won't read it all, but 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 may 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. When you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do. And then Jesus tells us how we are to pray.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, and so on. There are a few occasions when Jesus speaks to us about the subject of prayer, and rightly so because, as we know, prayer is one of the great privileges, the great blessings that we've been given.

I'm sure as a believer you couldn't imagine what it would be like if we didn't have the privilege of prayer. It would be almost impossible.

[1 : 30] You couldn't imagine what it would be like if we were only supposing we were told that there were certain times only within the week when we could come to God.

That apart from these times, prayer was out. You couldn't approach God. You couldn't speak to God. We would find that so difficult because one of the instincts that takes place whenever a person becomes a believer is they begin to pray.

That was said of the Apostle Paul when he was converted. Behold, he prays. And it's something that is instinctive. We cannot help it because we want to speak to God.

We want to draw near to God. Our hearts have been opened with love, and love wants to be in the company, in the nearness, in the fellowship, in the intimacy of the object of love.

But while it is an instinct, while it is something that we do, we have to confess that sometimes it's something that is very hard to do.

[2 : 34] And there's nobody here who doesn't know sometimes how difficult prayer can be. The fact that we do want to pray doesn't always mean that it's easy for us to do.

Now, it's one of the things that we know from the Word that prayer isn't simply a matter of coming to God, asking for certain things. Because if we simply look on prayer, where we come to God and we say to the Lord, Well, this is, I need this and I need that, and I want this and I want that, and Lord, if you'll give me this, and if you'll provide this, and do this and do that, then we've got the wrong idea, really, of what prayer is all about.

Of course, there are our requests. Of course, we come to God with our needs. We're told to do that in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.

An absolutely essential and vital part of our prayer life is our problems and our needs and our requests. And it's wonderful that we have that opportunity.

But if we tie it simply to that, we lose so much of what prayer is, because prayer really is worship.

[3 : 49] Prayer is where we come into the presence of the King of Glory. And it's very important that we focus upon the Lord. And that's one of the things that Jesus teaches us in this prayer.

Because if we begin with ourselves, we'll get stuck there. If we begin simply with where we're at. Now, don't get me wrong, there are times when things, where there are pressures and difficulties and sorrows and times in life where you have to go to the Lord, and it is about yourself.

And you go straight to Him. And if you've got a broken heart, you go out and you pour out your heart to Him. If you're looking for guidance really urgently, like Nehemiah, he needed the Lord's guidance.

He needed the Lord's help instantly. And so we find there are loads of occasions like that. But when we draw aside with the Lord in prayer, it's very important to focus and to begin by focusing upon the Lord.

And that's one of the things that Jesus teaches us here. Now, when this, of course, is called the Lord's prayer, it is a model for prayer.

[5 : 04] It is a prayer that He taught us in order to base our prayers upon. This is not His prayer. If we want to see Jesus, if we want to see a full description of Jesus in prayer, we go, for instance, to John chapter 17, where we have the great high priestly prayer.

Jesus is really praying. He's praying about Himself. He's praying about His church. He's praying about His disciples, His future disciples. Here He's giving us out a pattern for prayer.

And that doesn't mean that this is the only prayer that we pray, that when we come to pray, this is what we pray. But it also doesn't mean that we never pray this.

I think it's a most wonderful prayer. And what Jesus is really saying here is, this really is at the heart of prayer.

And if we pray this, what will happen, it should open doors for us so that we develop even from what is set out before us here.

[6 : 14] Now, Jesus, of course, in this part, in this section, teaches us the way we should or should not pray and what we should pray for.

And the very first thing He shows us in verse 5 is it's very important to be honest and to be sincere in prayer. When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites.

There are, sadly, people who are insincere in life. They don't mean what they say. And you would always have to take somebody like that with a pinch of salt because no matter how plausible or how flattering or how nice something they might say, if you know, sadly, that that is the kind of character that they're insincere, you won't take too seriously what they say.

And Jesus is saying, you mustn't be that kind of patient when you come to God in prayer. There has to be an honesty because He was saying that there were people, there were hypocrites, and you mustn't pray and to be like the hypocrites for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners that they may be seen by others.

And here are people who are wanting to put on an outward display for others so that people will think well of them and they'll say, my word, isn't that person gifted?

[7 : 40] Isn't that person devout? What a consecrated person that is so that all that these people are doing, it's an act before God.

They are acting so that people will think well of them, but God is saying, I'm not taken in by it. I know what you're like. I know what your heart is like. You are doing what you're doing, not for me, but it's for yourself.

And so Jesus is warning against any form of insincerity or hypocrisy in prayer. What Jesus is saying is, be honest in prayer.

When you come to the Lord, tell Him how it is. And that means being honest with regard to our failings, our failures, our sin. There has to be this openness so that we come to God and we say to the Lord, Lord, this is amazing.

You're giving me this opportunity and privilege to come to you and your things that you're seeking from the Lord. But you open up to the Lord and say, Lord, I'm going to tell you what I am.

[8 : 46] And we tell the Lord what we've done. Things that we're ashamed of, things that we regret, things that we know that are sinful in the sight. But we ask the Lord for forgiveness.

And the Lord, if we come sincerely and honestly by faith, and we've got to say that, that faith is at the very heart of prayer. You cannot come to God without faith.

Nobody can come to really pray. And supposing, supposing your prayer there is no more than three, four, five words long. If you come to the Lord meaning what you're saying and knowing and believing that He is who He says He is in the Word, that's faith.

You are exercising faith. You believe who He is. You believe what the Word says about Him and you believe that He is a hearer and an answerer of prayer.

So there has to be faith in us when we come to the Lord. But Jesus is saying there has to be honesty. Again, another thing we have to do is, verse 6, to get alone with the Lord.

[10 : 03] We need this time of solitude. So that we need these times to just to get alone with the Lord. In fact, to a certain extent, what we are in public will be based upon what we are in private.

And particularly in our Christian life, if we are never alone with the Lord, then our public Christianity won't be as effective as it should be.

Very much of what we are in public is based upon what we are in private. Get alone with the Lord. Lock yourself alone with the Lord. Spend time with the Lord.

Time spent alone with the Lord is never time lost. We live in a very busy world. And that is one of the great complaints believers have today is just the demands upon their time.

It is so hard to find time to get alone with the Lord in prayer. But make sure you do. Whatever has to go, make sure it is not your prayer time because it will impact negatively upon your Christian faith.

[11 : 15] Make sure you make time to be alone with the Lord. And the third thing that Jesus warns against is that we don't just heap up empty phrases.

That there isn't just a sort of a blind repetition in our prayer. He says that is the way the heathens do. Those who don't know the Lord. I suppose a picture of that is like, remember up on top of Mount Carmel when Elijah had challenged the prophets of Baal?

And you find the prophets of Baal, they were going round and round and they were chanting, O Baal, hear us! O Baal, hear us! And they thought because of the constant repetition of the same thing over and over and over and over again, there would be a response.

The Lord is saying, that's not the way it works. Now what Jesus is saying, Jesus is not saying that we're never to repeat the same thing in prayer.

Jesus is not saying if you pray something, that means you're never to repeat that prayer again.

You're never to ask for that again. That's not what Jesus is saying because Jesus himself repeated over and over.

[12 : 25] For instance, in the Garden of Gethsemane, he asked that the Father, is it possible that this cup might pass from me? Is it possible that I don't have to drink of it?

But not as I will, but as thou will. But then he went back and he prayed the same thing again. He went back to his disciples and then he went back and he prayed the same thing again. So you see, we're not to say we're never to pray the same thing again, but it's empty, meaningless things that just, where we're repeating them over and over and over again just for effect.

That's what Jesus is saying we're not to do. But then we find that Jesus then comes in to show us what we are to pray for.

And just to run through this very, very briefly. And he begins by saying, Our Father. Now, of course, there's two ways in which God has looked on as our Father.

There is a general way. It's not often spoken about in the Bible, but it is spoken about in the sense in which God at one level is a Father to all.

[13 : 39] And you have an instance of that in the Acts of the Apostles and where it says here that they should seek God that they might feel their way toward Him, yet He is not actually far from each one of us, for in Him we live, move, and have our being, being then God's offspring.

So, in the sense that God the Father as the Creator of all, that we are His offspring, all creation, all the human humanity is His offspring.

But the main way that Scripture talks about the Father is for the believer when a person comes to faith. And that really is where it is.

Because one of the wonderful things is when you become a Christian, straight away the Holy Spirit gives you a confidence to come to God calling Him Father.

We cry, Abba, Father. It's not something that we sort of sit down and look through books and sort of say, wonder if I can, or debate it with people and say, see, now that I'm a Christian, is it possible for me?

[14 : 54] No, it's instinctive. You draw me, your heart goes out, you can't help it. There's this instant relationship of oneness, no longer running away but running to.

He's my Father, He's the One who is Lord of my life. So there's this wonderful instinct by grace. Our Father, we're told, in heaven.

Now, of course, this is a sphere where God lives and God rules and it reminds us to a certain extent, I know we know that there are the different heavens and so on, but we've talked about these things before, but part of what this is saying is, look, when you approach your Father, remember where He is.

He's in heaven. He is in the place where He has no limitations, there are no limits. He is so altogether different to who you are.

And we must guard against bringing God down to the level of our own imagination and having, don't get me wrong, a sort of palsy-walsy and, oh, just make it all informal and everything is nice and cozy.

[16:08] He is the living and true God. He is the creator of this whole world. He holds the whole world and all the planetary system, everything in the hollow of His hand.

He rules and overrules everything. And we must never lose sight of that as we come to God in prayer. And yet, He has come down to meet with us.

And there is this intimate, personal relationship. It's quite extraordinary. Our Father, which art in heaven, that's what we're doing here today.

We're worshipping the God of heaven and earth. Our Father, which art in heaven. I said, remember that great declaration in Daniel, who does according to His will with the armies of heaven and with the inhabitants of the earth.

Hallowed be your name. Now, the name of God here really identifies His character and the nature of God. So, when we come before God, we're seeking to reverence.

[17:17] We're seeking to hallow. We're seeking to come with a sense of respect and awe within our heart. We do not come to one who is our equal.

One who has no equal. That's who we come to. It's quite extraordinary. And so, when we pray, hallowed be your name, we're saying, Lord, we are exalting the holiness, the majesty, the glory of your name.

We're wanting to see, almost like the way Isaiah saw when Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up. And he fell down before the majesty and glory of God.

Wouldn't it be wonderful as we come to God in prayer that we were seeing Him like that? That we live out our lives with a sense of this as the greatness and the majesty and the glory of God.

And then it says, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. That is really where we want God's kingdom, His rule established in this world.

[18:27] And that's what you and I want above all, isn't it? That God's kingdom would be established in this world. What a wonderful world it would be if the rule of God held sway.

It would be so different, so completely different to the way that societies by and large are being built with no thought of God at all.

And so we long, this is always at the heart of our prayer, and we should be praying that with regard to our own land. Lord, may your kingdom come into our land, into Scotland, into England, into Ireland, into Wales.

May it come into Europe, may it come throughout all this world. May your kingdom come here in Stornoway. May your kingdom come throughout the islands.

And we pray that sincerely, agonizingly, desperately. May your kingdom come. God's kingdom come and that's what happens when you come into your heart.

[19:37] The kingdom of God is within you. The rule of God began in your life and your heart. King Jesus became king of your life.

So God's kingdom has come into your heart. It's an amazing thing to think about it. God's kingdom in my heart. And that's what you pray for others.

If you're here today without the Lord as your king, will you pray that? Lord, may your kingdom come into my heart.

Set up rule, Lord, in my heart. Sit on the throne of my heart. Be my king and my Lord. Lord. And when we pray for the Lord's kingdom to come, I think we've got some view here also of the coming again of Jesus into this world.

That's something we long for again. Lord, may your kingdom come. Long for the day when Jesus will return. And then it says, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[20:45] In a sense, Jesus is here asking us to pray for heaven on earth. because the only place that God's will is really done in its entirety, in its perfection, is in heaven.

Because in this earth we know that there are so many things that are wrong and because of sin. Ask for the, we need to ask that we will be made willing that God's will will be done.

because sometimes we have difficulty with God's will. I'm sure all of us have at one point or another struggled with God's will in our life.

Because God's will has gone very, very differently to what our will, what we would will, what we would want, what we would require.

It hasn't worked out the way we wanted, the way we expected, the way we hoped for, the way that we thought was right. In fact, the way that everybody else thought was right as well.

[21 : 56] We struggle sometimes with God's will. And yet, the word of God tells us, as for God, perfect is his way.

And all we can do is that we've got to come to a place to understand or to try to understand that there will be places, there will be times when our humanity and the shallowness of who we are as finite creatures cannot in this world comprehend the depth of God's will.

That God actually is making sense of what to you may appear senseless, what may be hurting your heart.

God is saying, this actually, although you cannot see it like that, is right. This is the way. And I believe it's part of what will make glory so amazing is that we'll see it all, the tapestry all coming together.

And we'll say, ah, now, I can see, couldn't see on earth. And so we've got, this is why we have to submit and ask for the grace because it's not easy sometimes to submit under the holy will of God.

[23 : 20] Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And I believe this governs everything, not just our food, governs everything. Give us this day what we need physically, and mentally, and emotionally, and socially, and spiritually.

Give us each day the mental capacity to deal with the challenges that we have to face. Give us each day the emotional stability to deal with all the different relationships at work and at home and in all the different situations.

Give us each day spiritually the nourishment that we need for our life. Give us each day our daily bread. Brings us to the very simple place where we thank God for the food that we have, even when we sit down just to acknowledge.

You know, it's a wonderful thing to say grace, even if it's just a few words. It's by faith. All we're doing is thank you, Lord, for what you provided for me.

And that's faith, that's an acknowledgement, that's a gratitude. And that should be governing our lives. And again, when we come to it, give us this day our daily bread, we think about the word of God.

[24 : 38] Again, so often spoken in that context of the spiritual food, the spiritual nourishment. And then goes on to say, we're running through this very, very quickly, and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

just as we need daily feeding, we need daily cleansing. That's absolutely essential. And we need, we see it's actually a very challenging part of the prayer, because it says, forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

It doesn't say forgive us our debts as we intend to forgive our debtors, but as we have forgiven our debtors. We're saying to the Lord, Lord, forgive me, Lord, be merciful to me, and the Lord is saying, yes I will, but am I going to base it?

So Lord say, am I going to base it on the pattern of your forgiveness? We cannot really go to the Lord and say, Lord, forgive me all my sin.

I have let you down, I have betrayed you, I have denied you, I have done so many things against you, but by the way, don't ask me to forgive so and so and so and so and so and so and so.

[26 : 03] Lord doesn't deal like that. As we seek to have the slate cleaned between ourselves and the Lord, so the Lord is looking that the slate will be cleaned between ourselves and others.

That can be very difficult, and there's a whole area that we, that's a sermon in itself, but it raises many questions and it certainly raises challenges for ourselves as well, in how we deal with other people.

There might be areas and aspects that it needs going to people and sorting things out, but it's bringing very forcibly before us that we cannot be going to the Lord and saying forgive me when we ourselves don't forgive.

And you know, the more we see ourself, the more we see our own sin and just our own failure and twistedness, the more compassionate and the more tender and the more forgiving we will be to other people as well.

And then it says, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Again, we're acknowledging here our complete dependence upon the Lord for His protection and for His deliverance.

[27 : 29] Nobody is capable of standing on their own in the face of temptation. Now, temptation comes, there's two aspects to it. And these two things, I would say, there's a difference here.

You see, sometimes we can have the desire to do something that is wrong, but we don't have the opportunity. Sometimes we can have the opportunity to do what is wrong, but we don't have the desire.

When temptation is at its worst is when we have both the opportunity and the desire. a sinful desire married to the opportunity to do.

That's when we're at our most vulnerable and that is where we really need God's help. That is where we have to lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Because there will be times, you and I know that there can sometimes do wrong, but there isn't an opportunity. There are other times that there are plenty of opportunities to do wrong, but it doesn't even enter your thinking.

[28 : 51] Maybe afterwards you say to yourself, oh my word, it's just as well, these two things didn't come together, but we know all too well that sometimes the two things come together, and wow, that's when the alarm bells need to go.

That's when we need to pray. That's when we actually don't want to pray. When opportunity and desire have come together, we say, oh Lord, we try maybe even to block the Lord out, and that's when we really need Lord, I'm in a dangerous place, deliver me, and that's what we're to cry for. And so the Lord is setting out before us this prayer, because the Lord knows this world is difficult. Jesus went through this world as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

He understands temptation, he understands these things, and he says, it's tough, but I'm in it with you. I want you to come to me, I want you to depend on me, I want you to seek me, I want you to call upon me.

I am there for you. That's really at the heart of this prayer. May we then seek to live our life, basing our life upon what this prayer that the Lord has given us, trusting in the Lord who's given us this prayer.

[30 : 14] Let us pray. Lord, our God, we give thanks for the prayer that has been given to us in your word, and may we be able so often to base our own prayers upon it.

We give thanks for your tender care of us and for the patient way dealing with us. We pray to bless us, bless us as a congregation, and bless all who meet as we do today.

We pray to bless Ivor at the Shabbos communion, and we pray that the blessing of God, the communion of God, may be known in power there.

Bless us all and do us good, taking us all home safely, we pray. Forgive us our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. Concluding Psalm is Psalm 146.