



**Sunday School Lesson for July 10, 2005.
Released on July 6, 2005.**

"Practicing Genuine Piety"

Printed Text: Matthew 6:1-14

Devotional Reading: Luke 11:5-13

Background Scripture: Matthew 6:1-34

Time: A.D. 28

Place: Mountain near Capernaum

Matthew 6:1-14

1 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

2 Therefore when thou doest *thine* alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

3 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

4 That *thine* alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

Today's Aim

- 1) Identify what is wrong with acts of worship that are performed for others to see.
- 2) Describe the kinds of giving and praying that pleases God.
- 3) Decide what steps are necessary to bring one's own giving and praying into line with the teachings of Jesus.

Introduction

So, You Call Yourself Holy?

So, what is it that makes us holy? Is it the traditions we learned from the elders? Is it the speaking of tongues, although we have no translator? Or, is it because we run around the sanctuary lifting up holy hands, or we put the most money in the offertory? Maybe it's because of the gifts we've promised the people who may have a need.

Well, I can recall this couple who joined our church almost a year ago. Every Sunday, the young man would get out of his chair (and yes he was in the pulpit) and kneel down in an act of worship to God. He would then get up and run around the church. This went on month after month, Sunday after Sunday until people almost hated to see him get started. Then, one particular Sunday, his fiancé then joined him. They both were running around the church. His famous line was always- "Church you must not be afraid to praise God". You must learn how to praise him, bow down before him and worship him, etc.....Now, I must admit, I almost bought into this behavior. I would say to myself, wow he really loves the Lord. He is just full of fire and it's non-stop every Sunday, until- he disappeared for a whole month with the only excuse being "he was tired from working 16 hours a day".

Well, this same gentleman also got up one Sunday morning and professed over the pulpit that the Lord has blessed him and his fiancé to bless others. They just have an abundance of shoes and they don't have room to store them all so they will be giving most of them away for free. If you are interested, please see him and his fiancé after church on next Sunday. Well, you know what, the Sunday he made this announcement was their last Sunday at the church. Now, what if someone in the congregation was in need of shoes, came back the next Sunday only to find out there were no shoes to given away?

Or, what about the deacon who has prayed the same prayer every Sunday for the past umpteen years. You know the one, Heavenly Father oh Heavenly Father, somebody has a heart condition, somebody has arthritis, bless that little boy and that little girl down the way, oh Heavenly Father, and Sunday, after Sunday, after Sunday, this is what we heard.

Well let's see. We have an external show of "religion," a charitable deed promised to a body of believers which was non-deliverable, and a repetitious prayer that has been prayed for the past 15 years.

-Let's take a look at this week's Lesson to see how Jesus instructs his followers and disciples.

Lesson Background

In this week's lesson, Jesus was still teaching his disciples and followers. Jesus insisted that His followers must do better than the scribes and Pharisees had done (5:20). The scribes and Pharisees were widely regarded as experts in carrying out God's laws, but in fact they had missed the point. They kept the externals of the laws, but Jesus insisted that His disciples start on the inside with the heart. When they did they would be ready to practice genuine righteousness-not for people, but for God.

Charitable Deeds

1. Why should we examine ourselves when doing "acts of righteousness" (Matthew 6:1)?

To be righteous means to be godly, upright, just, moral, good, puritanical, devout and virtuous.

Righteousness, according to the Pharisees, consisted of those things that were done to gain the attention and applause of man. The Pharisees had set up their own standards of what they perceived as righteousness. They were very much consumed with holding on to the religious traditions and rituals that they ignorantly rejected the commandments of God. [See Mark 7:1-13]

Here, in Matthew 6:1-14, Jesus was teaching his followers that they must do better than the scribes and Pharisees when it came to doing a charitable deed and offering up prayer. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees, they performed charitable acts for the sake of being noticed and made themselves the center of attention when they prayed on the street corners. All of this was done in order to gain the attention of men and not to be pleasing in the sight of God. They appeared to be religious (to those around them) but were not religious at all.

Jesus wanted his followers to know that the focus for doing such things should be as a reverence rendered unto God- that which comes straight from a sincere heart. If their primary goal is to be pleasing in God's sight, their righteousness will without a doubt exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. To be pleasing in God's sight has it's eternal reward but to be pleasing in the sight of man amounts to nothing.

2. Define "hypocrite." What was wrong with the way the charitable deeds were performed in verse 2?

The word "hypocrite" is defined as one who is full of deceit, insincerity, sanctimonious or has a Pharisee spirit. Hypocrites are not sincere in what they do. They only do things for self-gratification. In other words, they want to be the center of attention. All eyes must be on them. The Pharisees were in fact hypocrites. They performed charitable deeds as an external act of practical righteousness, in which they did for the sole purpose of gaining the attention of man. They only performed these deeds to bring honor to themselves instead of God. Jesus said, that their only reward would be (them being seen by men and nothing more).

Jesus goes on to say that before some of them would give their alms, they would sound a trumpet. This is how they would put themselves on display and get everyone's attention. What was the benefit to those who looked upon the Pharisees? There was none.

What we as Christians must focus on is to be pleasing in the sight of God by letting our light shine for the purpose of glorifying Him so that others are drawn out of darkness into the light to receive, by Faith, the gift of eternal life. The bottom line here is that there was no eternal value in what the Pharisees were doing because they were doing it for external gain. All that they were doing was in vain. What does it profit for a man to gain the world; and then lose his soul (Mat. 16:26)?

3. What did Jesus promise when we do charitable deeds in ways that honor and please God? (vs. 3,4)

We as believers must avoid bringing attention to ourselves. We must not clothe ourselves in pride and arrogance as the Pharisees did. For when we do our good deeds, we are to do them in secret- away from the eyes of others. Doing deeds in secret helps transform our attitude toward others. We will put aside all hypocrisy, and our expressions of commitment will be directed to God rather than to others. Trying to avoid bringing attention to ourselves is evidence of a humble spirit that is in the right relationship with God. This means that what we do comes from a heart that loves God and wants to fulfill His will with regard to how we reach out to those in need. Our deeds should be motivated by a desire to serve and praise God. Jesus said in verse 4 that his Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward openly which can be in many different ways.

Prayer

4. What did Jesus say about the way the hypocrites prayed? (v. 5)

As we know, the hypocrites resume consisted of the following attributes: experienced in false profession of desirable or publicly approved qualities, beliefs, or feelings; and a pretense of having virtues, moral principals, or religious beliefs that one does not really possess. So, now we have the hypocrites standing in the synagogues praying and standing about on the corners of the streets praying in such a fashion that one would think they are academy award winning prayer warriors. Can you imagine all of the attention they must have been receiving? Their sole purpose was so they could

be seen by men. They wanted to be looked upon as important and prestigious in the sight of man. They themselves wanted to be glorified, and they have received their total "reward" of glory from the crowds.

5. What should one's prayer life be like, and how will God respond to that? (vs. 5,6)

Prayer is a devout petition to God, a spiritual communion with God, and a form of worship, as in supplication, thanksgiving, or adoration. Jesus emphasized that prayer should normally be done in private, behind closed doors, where others do not see. What is important here is that prayer is the way we communicate to God, and in praying our attention and focus is to be solely on him. To pray in private provides us with the opportunity to become intimate with God. It allows for us to communicate our heart's desire to him without holding back. This is not to say that public prayer is not important because it is. The emphasis here is whether or not prayer is done sincerely from the heart or for the sake of being seen by man.

Those who consistently pray in private are best prepared to pray in public. How would we learn how to address the needs and concerns for others if we don't have a personal relationship with God? This personal relationship is developed through private prayer. Spending private time with God is how we learn of Him and His Will. When we do the will of the Father, we will draw closer unto him and find out that He will meet our needs as we concentrate on doing that which is pleasing in His sight.

6. What are vain-repetitions and why are they to be avoided in prayer? (vs. 7,8)

Prayers are not to be merely recited, nor are our words to be repeated thoughtlessly, or as if they were automatic formulas. This is, however, the way the hypocrites prayed. Their prayers were meaningless. They didn't put any thought into who they were praying to and what they were praying for. They were just babbling, using the same words over and over to get men to look at them and consider them of high importance because of the many words they used. We must ask ourselves this question, how much regard did they have for God to offer up to him fruitless, meaningless babble? They had no regard for Him at all. Our God is an intelligent God. He is the maker and creator of the Heavens and the Earth.

Prayer in this manner (according to the Pharisees) most certainly should be avoided because no thought is put into it and it lacks sincerity. Also, in relation to prayer, the Pagan worshippers believed it was necessary for them to get the attention of their various gods and that they could do this by repeatedly calling out to them with the same words. What we as believers must realize when we pray and call upon the Father is that He is all knowing and knows what we need before we even ask and this type of repetition is not necessary. But don't let us get this confused with coming to God with the same request repeatedly. By us coming to him more than once is just an indication of the faith we have in Him to answer our prayer requests according to His will. Let us realize that we serve an awesome and mighty God. A God who is full of wisdom. A God who saw a need before we even knew we would have a need. Remember that the next time you pray.

7. Why did Jesus teach his disciples the Lord's Prayer? (v. 9)

The foundation of prayer is a personal relationship with God our Father. The Lord's Prayer was used as a model for Jesus' disciples. It was to teach them how to relate to God. It showed them how they should pray and what they should pray for. It is notable for its brevity (clear and conciseness), simplicity, and comprehensiveness. Of the 6 petitions, 3 are directed to God and 3 are directed toward human needs.

Jesus did not want his disciples to be like/follow behind the hypocrites who only prayed for an outward show so He taught them how to pray. This was the start of a foundation on which they could build a relationship with God.

We must remember that prayer is not just a reciting of words, it is to be comprised of sincere expressions of the heart, realizing that our total dependency is in the hands of God our Father. When we pray, we show forth an attitude of awe, submission, dependence, and complete confidence in His "Father Love".

8. Why is it important to address God properly and remember His concerns and interests? (vs. 9,10)

First, we must realize who God is. God is holy and he is righteous. We must recognize Him (for His name represents all of His character and attributes) and his place of abode (the Heavens). By recognizing the deity of God, and recognizing that He is set apart and holy, puts us in the proper frame of mind as we come to Him in prayer. It reminds us that we are to be holy because of who He is. Remember when Moses was coming into the presence of God? God told him to take off his shoes for this is holy ground (Exodus 3:5). This was a sign of reverence in a holy place, one set apart from the norm because God was present there. These commands prevented Moses from rashly intruding, unprepared, into God's presence.

We too are to consider the holiness of God when we come into his presence through prayer. If we consider His holiness, we will come to Him in worship- thanking Him and praising Him for all that He is, acknowledging that He is the true and living God, the very reason why we breathe the breath of life. Secondly, we must be mindful of living out the kingdom principles and be effective in spreading the good news about Jesus Christ. Thirdly, all prayer should willingly submit to God's purposes, plans and glory. If you notice here, prayer to God should be God focused and not self-centered as the Pharisees prayed. We must acknowledge God, His plan and His glory and not be so eager to address our needs and concerns. We need to take the time out to speak to God about His concerns and interests for He is the reason why we live.

9. Why should we pray about daily physical needs? (v. 11)

The request for "daily bread" is more than just food. It entails all of our physical needs. Asking God to give us our daily bread expresses both dependence on Him and confidence in Him that he will supply our every need. For we should not concern ourselves with what tomorrow may bring. But let us be rest assured in knowing that God made us and is certainly capable of providing for us the security that is needed in this life's journey. Remember Jehovah Jireh- My provider.

10. How important is it that we forgive others? (vs. 12-14)

To enjoy the benefits and the fullness of our own forgiveness, we must forgive others. Forgiveness is like a coin. It is a single unit with two sides. The attitude which enables us to accept forgiveness is the same attitude which compels us to extend it. If we are unable to forgive others, our hardness will prevent us from accepting God's forgiveness.

We as Christians must allow room for forgiveness in our hearts as God through His son, Jesus, forgave us. If we are the children of God, we should display His characteristics. Because he forgave us (because we repented) for our shortcomings, we ought to forgive others as well. Romans 3:23 says "For we all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God". The only reason we are justified is through the blood that Jesus shed for the remission of our sins. So who are we to hold back forgiveness? Is that the Christian character? Of course not. Let us show brotherly love one to another. Ephesians 4:32 says- "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." Those who have been forgiven so much by God should, of all people, forgive those offenses against them by others. We as believers are followers of Christ. Christ, as the model of forgiveness, has forgiven all of our sins totally, and we as believers must be willing to forgive others as well.

Conclusion

To have a relationship with God is a personal, not a public kind of thing. Thus our acts of righteousness (6:1), our gifts of loving concern (vs. 2-4), and our prayers of devotion (vs. 5-8) are to be done "in secret" to please Him rather than to win a reputation for piety with our fellowmen.

The disciple's prayers are also personal, approaching God as "our Father" and expressing our delight in His will and our dependence on Him (vs. 9-13). An "in secret" relationship with God will free us to value heavenly rather than earthly treasures, thus transforming our values. Knowing God in the intimate, private, and personal relationship a child has with a father will free us from anxiety, for we will realize that our Father will meet our needs as we concentrate on doing those things that please Him.

So let us not be like the Pharisees, who were going through the motions of being religious. For they only had a form of godliness. Being Godly was far from their heart.

Remember, through the heart is the way God sees man. So, let us do a work for the Lord that has spiritual value, let us pray prayers that are sincere and from the heart, and let us forgive others as Christ forgave us.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for being a God full of mercy and a God full of Grace. Thank you for recognizing our shortcomings. Thank you for making provisions for us to be reconciled back to you. You are Holy, you are Righteousness and you are Just. Lord God, put me on the potter's wheel and shape me and mold me into what

you want me to be Lord- for I want to be pleasing in thy sight. For what profit is it for me to gain the things of the world or the praises of man? There is none. But to live for you is eternal gain. Thank you Lord for shedding your blood for the sins of the world. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thought to Remember

In all that you do, strive to be pleasing in the sight of God and not look to gain the praises of men.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

Study Matthew 13:9-17 for next week's lesson "**Learning to Listen.**"

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