

Matthew 6:5-8

- Prayer, worship in communion with the Father -

Author: Evert Jan Hempenius

© 2018

www.christianstudylibrary.org

For any questions about this Scripture passage or the notes, please contact us through the Contact Us tab on the website.

Introduction

- ❖ Christians pray, alone or together with others, in private, and in public. What did Jesus taught about prayer?
- ❖ So prayer, the purpose of which is not to exercise the tongue, does not inform or remind God of anything; it is instead worship, and it serves to cleanse the mind, purify the heart, and align one's will with God's will (Mt 6:10); it recalls to the supplicant who God is and what his purposes are.¹
- ❖ Before giving the Lord's prayer, Jesus focussed on the right attitude when we pray.
 - Private prayer is a moment of intimacy between the Father and the believer. There is no need to hide something because the Father knows the heart and the mind. There is no need to exhibit religious behaviour, lengthy prayers, beautifully chosen words, to be seen or heard by others.
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological notes, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a "stand-alone".
- ❖ These sermon outlines refer sometimes to articles published on Wikipedia. This is done for accessibility reasons only.

¹ Davies, W. D., & Allison, D. C., Jr. (2004, p 590).

Context

- ❖ To understand the teachings of Jesus, a brief summary of the background is necessary.
- ❖ The baptism of Jesus (Mt. 3:13-17):
 - Before Jesus was baptized by John, he said: “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this **to fulfill all righteousness.**”
 - And after: “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw **the Spirit of God** descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”
 - The Sermon on the Mount teaches this **fulfillment of all righteousness.** “For I tell you that unless **your righteousness surpasses** that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law...” (Mt. 5:20).
- ❖ The preaching of Jesus:
 - Jesus had already been preaching in the synagogues in Galilee for some time before he delivered his sermon on the mount. Matthew summarized these sermons as follows:
 - “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**’” (Mt. 4:17).
 - Jesus continued and took over the ministry of John the Baptist:
 - “In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, ‘**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**’” (Mt. 3:1–2).
 - And later on, when Jesus sent out his twelve disciples:
 - “As you go, preach this message: ‘**The kingdom of heaven is near**’” (Mt. 10:7).
 - These two aspects, repentance, and the kingdom are prominent in the Sermon on the Mount.
- ❖ The life of Jesus Christ:
 - Jesus taught the Law and the Prophets, and he lived according to the Law and the Prophets. The Sermon on the Mount reflects his life. He lived according to his own teachings and by doing so set an example for his followers, the disciples. A clear example is found in Matthew 5:39: “Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” When Jesus was arrested, he didn’t strike back.
- ❖ The future of the Kingdom:
 - After his resurrection, Jesus summoned his eleven disciples to go back to the mount: “**All authority in heaven and on earth** has been given to me. Therefore go and make

disciples of all nations (...) and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**" (Mt. 28:18-20).

- This authority is reflected in expressions like: **"But I tell you** that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" (Mt. 5:22).
- And in: "Not everyone who says to me, **'Lord, Lord,'** will enter the kingdom of heaven, but..." (Mt. 7:20).

Form and structure

Prayer: the central focus of the Sermon on the Mount

- ❖ The Sermon on the Mount consists of five main parts:
 - 1. General calling to repentance and the promise of the Kingdom: Matthew 5:3-10, characterized by: "Blessed are..."
 - 2. Then Jesus turns to his disciples and all who want to learn from him: "Blessed are **you...**" The main theme is **"the prophets"** (Mt. 5:11-16).
 - 3. The central part is an exposition of the Law and the Prophets (Mt. 5:17-7:12):
 - "Do not think that I have come to **abolish the Law or the Prophets**; I have not come to abolish them but to **fulfil** them" (Mt. 5:17)...
 - **The Lord's Prayer is found at the center of the sermon!**
 - "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up **the Law and the Prophets**" (Mt. 7:12).
 - 4. After his exposition of the Law and the Prophets, he returns to the theme of the Prophets and warns against **"the false prophets"** (Mt. 7:13-23). This contrasts with the second part of the sermon.
 - 5. He concludes his sermon again with a general call to choose: **"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine..."**(Mt. 7:24-27).

Prayer (Matthew 6:5-15)

How we pray (Mt 6:5-8)	
(1) And when you pray,	But when you pray,
do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners	go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father,

to be seen by others.	who is unseen.
Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.	Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.
(2) And when you pray,	
do not keep on babbling like pagans,	Do not be like them,
for they think they will be heard because of their many words.	for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.
What we should pray (Mt 6:9-13)	
<p>'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'</p> <p><i>(For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.)</i></p>	
The necessity of forgiveness (Mt 6:14, 15)	
For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.	But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Technical and hermeneutical notes

- ❖ It is important to realize that Jesus preached his sermon around 30 AD in Galilee.
 - To Jews living in a country,
 - which was part of the Roman Empire;
 - who had contact with the Hellenistic (Greek) and Roman culture; this culture was prominent in a city like Tiberias (Lake of Tiberias = Sea of Galilee) and the Decapolis, nowadays Jordan.
 - To Jews,
 - who frequented the synagogues and were used to listening to the teaching of the Pharisees and scribes, their spiritual leaders at that time;
 - who were expecting the promised One (according to Dt. 18:15-18; Mal. 4:4-5; Mt. 11:3);
 - who were longing for the restoration of the Kingdom of God (Mt. 11:12), the main theme of the teaching of Jesus.

- ❖ Knowledge of this background is necessary for understanding some passages of the sermon, especially those that speak of persecution (Mt. 5:10-12), pagans (Mt. 6:7, 32) and of hypocrites.
 - The selection of topics found within the Sermon on the Mount reflects some debated issues among first century Jews such as (Mt. 5:31-32; Mt. 19:3-9). Jesus doesn't cover all aspects of the Law, for instance, the fourth commandment (Sabbath Day) is not found here, although it was hotly debated between the Pharisees and Jesus (Mt. 12:1-8). Neither does he refer to the greatest commandment (Mt. 22:37-40).
 - He especially confronts the teaching of the Pharisees and Scribes. Some of the topics found in the sermon are also found in Matthew 23, where he condemns them for their hypocritical stance.
 - Jesus doesn't give a new set of rules or applications but teaches a different mindset. This mindset is governed by (see application):
 - the blessings of the Kingdom (Mt. 5:3-10);
 - the Lord's prayer (Mt. 6:9-13), the central part of the sermon.
- ❖ "Most scholars believe the Gospel of Matthew was composed between AD 80 and 90, with a range of possibility between AD 70 to 110 (a pre-70 date remains a minority view)."² It is interesting to note that Jesus refers to "the altar." "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar." Since the altar at the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed by the later Roman emperor Titus AD 70, the question remains why Matthew did include this reference of Jesus to the altar, while at the time of writing his gospel the altar didn't exist any longer. Therefore a date of composition before AD 70 is more likely.

Exposition

Righteousness

- ❖ Prayer is one the (three) religious practices. "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Mt 6:1). Jesus teaches three acts of righteousness:
 - Almsgiving (Mt 6:2-4).
 - Prayer (Mt 6:5-15).
 - Fasting (Mt 6:16-18).
 - Righteousness ("δικαιοσύνη") is the quality or characteristic of upright behavior, *uprightness, righteousness*.³

² Gospel of Matthew. (n.d.). Retrieved February 09, 2017, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Matthew

³ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 248).

- The Kingdom of heaven and his righteousness is the main theme of the Sermon on the Mount.
 - “Blessed are those who **hunger and thirst for righteousness**, for they will be filled” Mt 5:6).
 - “For I tell you that unless **your righteousness** surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:20).
 - “But seek first **his kingdom and his righteousness**, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt 6:33).
 - This teaching is of particular importance in relation to prayer: “all these things will be given to you as well.”

Verse 5-6

❖ “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing.”

- John Stott remarks: “Of course the discipline of regular prayer is good; all devout Jews prayed three times a day like Daniel. And there was nothing wrong in standing to pray, for this was the usual posture for prayer among Jews. Nor were they necessarily mistaken to pray *at the street corners* as well as *in the synagogues* if their motive was to break down segregated religion and bring their recognition of God out of the holy places into the secular life of every day. But Jesus uncovered their true motive as they stood in synagogue or street with hands uplifted to heaven in order that they might *be seen by men*. Behind their piety lurked their pride. What they really wanted was applause. They got it. ‘They have received their reward in full’”⁴
- Jews regularly prayed while standing, especially in public. They also bent their knees in public and lifted up their hands towards heaven (1 Kings 8:54; Ezra 9:5; Mk 14:32–5; Acts 20:36; 21:5).

❖ “But when you pray, go into your (private) room, close the door and pray to your Father.”

- Jesus often prayed in solitude (Mt 14:23; Mk 1:35; 6:46).
- “**You**” is singular and *emphatic*. This is about private prayer. In the next passage (6:7, 8) Jesus uses the plural “**your**” and “**our**”, which means that the Lord’s prayer is given for common use in public (liturgies).
- When you are in your private room, there is nothing to hide from other people, and there is nothing to exhibit to other people. **It is just you and your Father.**
 - To hide your fears, your secrets, your hidden sins, your emotions of joy and thankfulness. The Father already knows.

⁴ Stott, J. R. W. (1992, p. 133).

- “O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord. You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain” (Ps 139:1-6).
 - The prayer of Solomon: “then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with each man according to all he does, **since you know his heart (for you alone know the hearts of all men)**” (1 Kings 8:39).
 - “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. **Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account**” (Heb 4:13).
- To exhibit: your “godliness,” the “beauty of your prayers,” “your righteousness,” of which Jesus gave the following example:
- “The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get’” (Lk 18:11, 12).

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.	go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.
Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.	Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

- ❖ **“Who is unseen.”** This contrasts to be seen by other people.
 - Humans are vulnerable to the opinions of others, whether it be praise or critique. Some fear to fail, to make mistakes.
- ❖ **“Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”** The reward:
 - Newman and Stine comment: “The meaning of the Greek structure translated *who is in secret* is unclear. Compare the expression as it occurs in verse 4. A number of translations maintain the literalism of the Greek text, but others try to make some meaning of the strange expression. TEV and NIV have ‘who is unseen’; others go in the direction of NJB: ‘who is in that secret place’ (see NEB, FRCL). NAB translates ‘pray to your Father in private.’ In favor of the interpretation given in NJB and NAB is the clause

who sees in secret, which suggests that the emphasis is upon the Father's ability to see what takes place, because he is there in that private place. If translators follow the lead of TEV and NIV in translating *who is in secret*, they may say 'whom nobody can see' or 'that no one sees.' Those who follow the interpretation of NJB and NAB will have a phrase such as 'who is in that private place' or 'who is there (where you are praying).' The translation of *who sees in secret* will then be similar: 'Your Father who sees what you do in secret (or, private),' 'who sees what others can't see' or 'your Father who sees what you do there (or, in that private place).'⁵

-
- "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. **He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.**" (Jn 14:21)
- "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. **My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him**" (Jn 14:23).
- The reward is the intimate communion with God.

Verse 7-8

❖ "Pagans"

- These pagans were people with a Greek and a Roman background, who lived in cities like Tiberias and the cities of the Decapolis, nowadays Jordan.

❖ "for they think they will be heard because of their many words."

- "Roman religion was practical and contractual, based on the principle of *do ut des*, 'I give that you might give.' Religion depended on knowledge and the correct practice of prayer, ritual, and sacrifice, not on faith or dogma.⁶
 - Christian prayer is different, not based on the principle of *do ut des*, but on the principle of *grace*.
- "All sacrifices and offerings required an accompanying prayer to be effective. Pliny the Elder declared that 'a sacrifice without prayer is thought to be useless and not a proper consultation of the gods.' Prayer by itself, however, had independent power. The spoken word was thus the single most potent religious action, and knowledge of the correct verbal formulas the key to efficacy. Accurate naming was vital for tapping into the desired powers of the deity invoked, hence the proliferation of cult epithets among

⁵ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, p. 165).

⁶⁶ "Religion in ancient Rome." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 5 Mar. 2018, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_ancient_Rome.

Roman deities. Public prayers were offered loudly and clearly by a priest on behalf of the community. Public religious ritual had to be enacted by specialists and professionals faultlessly; a mistake might require that the action, or even the entire festival, be repeated from the start.”⁷

“Even private prayer by an individual was formulaic, a recitation rather than a personal expression, though selected by the individual for a particular purpose or occasion.”⁸

- “With regard to prayer in the Gentile world, the magical papyri put us in touch with a piety which believed in incantations and in the beneficial effect of mechanical repetition.” “We can be certain that the making of long prayers—which is often evidence of anxiety or superstition—was common.”⁹
- Davies and Allison refer to Ecclesiastes 5:2: “Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.”¹⁰

❖ **“for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”**

- Davies and Allison comment: “The followers of Jesus, unlike others, keep their prayers short because of their confidence in God. Their Father in heaven—who is omniscient—knows what they need and will give it to them (Mt 6:32). So prayer, the purpose of which is not to exercise the tongue, does not inform or remind God of anything; it is instead worship, and it serves to cleanse the mind, purify the heart, and align one’s will with God’s will (Mt 6:10); it recalls to the supplicant who God is and what his purposes are. Compare Chrysostom, *Hom. on Mt. 19:5*: ‘Wherefore must we pray? Not to instruct Him, but to prevail with Him; to be made intimate with Him, by continuance in supplication; to be humbled; to be reminded of thy sins’.”¹¹

❖ **“What you need”** is the content of the Lord's prayer.

- A short summary:
 - There is only one God and Father of all, who has created all things and who sustains his creation.
 - He is present among us by his NAME (Ex 3:14).

⁷ “Religion in ancient Rome.” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 5 Mar. 2018, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_ancient_Rome.

⁸ “Religion in ancient Rome.” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 5 Mar. 2018, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_ancient_Rome.

⁹ Davies, W. D., & Allison, D. C., Jr. (2004, p. 588).

¹⁰ Davies, W. D., & Allison, D. C., Jr. (2004, p. 558).

¹¹ Davies, W. D., & Allison, D. C., Jr. (2004, p. 590).

- His kingdom and his will bring justice, mercy and peace.
- He is the source of all good gifts, the daily bread (Mt 6:25-32).
- Forgiveness will restore and heal all relationships (Mt 6:14, 15).
- Evil is the root cause of all sin, unbelief, broken relationships (Mt 4:1-10).
- God will answer this prayer.
 - He will transform the lives of people through his Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13).
 - He will transform the lives of people into the new creation (Eph 4:24).

Application

Verse 5-8

- ❖ There is a difference between personal and public prayer. Jesus doesn't demise public prayer, but the prayer with the wrong intentions, to receive praise from others.
- ❖ The right intentions are:
 - “Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (James 4:7-10).
 - “For this is what the high and lofty One says— he who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite” (Isa 57:15; Ps. 34:18; 51:17).
 - Compare Matthew 5:3: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
- ❖ Prayer makes one aware of the intimate and personal relationship with the Father.
 - This relationship and communion with the Father is characterised by:
 - Faith and love.
 - Trust and dependency.
 - Obedience and mercy.
 - It is a deep relationship given by communion of the Holy Spirit.
 - This relationship is not based on the principles of a contract (*do ut des*) but on grace.
- ❖ There is no need, even it is impossible, to hide anything from the Father.

- ❖ **“For your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”**
 - The Lord’s prayer is the ultimate summary of what we need.
 - It is a communal prayer, because of the use of the plural.
- ❖ There is so much, what can distract from prayer.

Christian liturgy

- ❖ A very old prescription of the use of the Lord’s prayer is found in the Didache¹² (2nd century A.D.): “8. And let not your fastings be with the hypocrites, for they fast on the second and the fifth day of the week; but do ye keep your fast on the fourth and on the preparation (the sixth) day. ²Neither pray ye *as the hypocrites*, but as the Lord commanded in His Gospel, *thus pray ye: Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debt, as we also forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one; for Thine is the power and the glory for ever and ever.* ³Three times in the day pray ye so.¹³
- ❖ Pray with the Angels. Chrysostom: **When you pray, it is as if you were entering into a palace—not a palace on earth, but far more awesome, a palace in heaven. When you enter there, you do so with complete attentiveness and fitting respect.** For in the houses of kings all turmoil is set aside, and silence reigns. Yet here you are being joined by choirs of angels. You are in communion with archangels and singing with the seraphim, who sing with great awe their spiritual hymns and sacred songs to God, the Lord of all. So when you are praying, mingle with these voices, patterning yourself according to their mystical order. It is not to human beings that you are praying but to God, who is present everywhere, who hears even before you speak and who knows already the secrets of the heart. If you pray to this One, you shall receive a great reward. “For your Father who sees in secret shall reward you openly.” He did not merely say he would give it to you but reward you, as if he himself had made a pledge to you and so honored you with a great honor. Because God himself is hidden, your prayer should be hidden. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 19.3.¹⁴

Bibliography

¹² “Didache.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 16 Mar. 2018, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didache.

¹³ Lightfoot, J. B., & Harmer, J. R. (1891, p. 232).

¹⁴ Simonetti, M. (Ed.). (2001, p. 126, 127).

Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Davies, W. D., & Allison, D. C., Jr. (2004). *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (Vol. 1). London; New York: T&T Clark International.

Hendriksen, W. (1973). *New Testament commentary: Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Lightfoot, J. B., & Harmer, J. R. (1891). *The Apostolic Fathers*. London: Macmillan and Co.

Simonetti, M. (Ed.). (2001). *Matthew 1–13*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Stott, J. (1992). *The message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian counter-culture*. (2nd ed.). Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press.

Wallace, D. B. (1996). *Greek grammar beyond the basics: An exegetical syntax of the New Testament with scripture, subject, and Greek word indexes*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.