

When You Pray.

Text: Mat 6:5-15

Suggested Hymns:

422, 420, 424, 291, 426

- 1) Be sure to remember why you are praying
- 2) Remember who this God is to whom you are praying
- 3) Be sure when you pray that you know what to pray for
- 4) Be certain that you are in the proper condition to pray.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 6:5-15, ⁵ *“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.*

⁶ *“But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.* ⁷ *“And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.* ⁸ *“Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.*

⁹ *“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father who 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 you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ “But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In the Old Testament Lesson we heard Solomon’s response to God’s question, *“Ask! What shall I give you?”* Solomon prayed not for

riches but rather for wisdom to lead God's People. God was pleased with his prayer.

Today we have come to hear Jesus as He gives us a portion of His Sermon on the Mount. In the New Testament Jesus asks us, "*What do you want Me to do for you?*"¹ How do we answer this question in a God pleasing way?

In our text we have the answer because we are in effect asking Jesus, "*Lord, teach us to pray.*" Here Jesus teaches you what is absolutely essential when you pray. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. When You Pray, Be Sure To Remember Why You Are Praying

It should be noted, to begin with, that Jesus simply takes for granted that people will pray. When He looks at us and sees us as we are involved in our day to day lives, it is inconceivable to Him that there would be anyone who would not pray. Surrounded as we are with many and great dangers that defy man's power to cope with them, what can we do, except to cry out for higher help and seek greater deliverance than our own.

Walking on the thin ice of daily uncertainty, or stumbling along the rocky path of trouble and anxiety, what can we do, except to reach out for a hand to sustain and strengthen us. With our heart constantly like lead within us, under the oppressive weight of inescapable sorrows and our conscience in turmoil because of fear, doubt and guilt, we cannot live in joy and peace, unless we seek a light and a hope and a peace outside of ourselves. This then gives us a comfort which is beyond the fluctuations of our own feelings.

Yes, with Jesus' deeper insight into our needs, He felt certain that people would pray. What a frightful condemnation is involved here on those who do not pray! Jesus does not even consider the possibility that this might happen. Certainly they could under no circumstances be considered children of God.

If we pride ourselves on our own self-sufficiency and acknowledge dependence on nothing but ourselves, then our self-confident boasts are our real shame and our self-attained heights, the depths of our disgrace before God. Jesus simply took for granted that people, especially His people, would pray.

There is such a thing as praying with the wrong attitudes and in the wrong way and for the wrong things. Therefore, when you pray, be sure to remember why you are praying.

We are more than self-deceived if we do not pray, but there can be a real deception of self and others when we do pray. There was a certain type of hypocrisy especially prevalent in Jesus' day, when men wanted above everything else to be considered pious by others. So, in order to foster this opinion of themselves, they would take their stand in the synagogues and even on the street corners and by their whole appearance let everyone within sight know what they were doing.

With folded hands and eyes looking heaven-ward and a concentrated countenance they would pray in the most crowded places in the hope that people passing by would declare aloud or whisper with real reverence and even some envy, *"Look how they spend their time in praying! What holy people they must be!"*

"Well," says Jesus, *"they have their reward."* What they look for in their praying, they get. They want others to see their praying as an evidence of their piety. They have what they look for in their praying, because others consider them pious for doing it.

But they get nothing from God, because with their prayers they look for nothing from God. They never want to get beyond the ears and the attention of other people, and so they do not get the ears and the attention of God. Prayer always serves its purpose and gets what it asks for, even prayer like this.

It seems difficult at first to find a parallel for this type of hypocrisy in our day, because there seems to be no particular advantage in being considered pious or godly.

Actually everything would indicate that people today are practicing a new kind of hypocrisy, a hypocrisy by which they would have others believe, not that they are better than they really are, but that they are worse.

Far from praying in order to be seen by men, they would rather have everyone think that they don't pray at all. Whatever piety they have they rather hide, than carry on their sleeve, and whatever light of Christ might shine in their life, they rather place under a bushel. They prefer to be identified with the

crowd, than to oneness with Christ, and they seek much more to do what is commonly done than to follow the precepts of God.

Rather than be the salt of the earth, they would rather have people think that they are of the earth, and so they lose their savour in the attempt to hide it and end up good for nothing, except to be cast out and trodden underfoot.

Does this mean, then, that Christ's words here do not have a relevant application to us? Certainly not, because man has not changed except that his hypocrisy takes on different forms and his sin new modes of expression.

We might even use our Christian worship as a device with which we deceive ourselves. Having spoken our prayers together with the rest, we may be able to convince ourselves that we have really prayed. Simply having been here without heart participation, we might easily bring ourselves to think that we have been in sincere contact with God. Bringing our body to the place of prayer, assuming the posture of prayer, and having our lips speak the words of prayer are not yet praying.

That is why, when you pray, remember that you are praying to God. Jesus tells us that this kind of prayer is to be done in secret, in some place of solitude where we are alone with our Father. This certainly does not mean that we are never to pray in public or in groups, but it does remind us that prayer at all times is the secret unfolding of our hearts to God.

And this is equally true whether it be here in church or whether it be in a quiet place in your home, or with a number of your fellow worshipers or when you are all alone. The place itself is not emphasised at all. It is the attitude alone which makes it Christ-instructed prayer or prayer to be seen by men.

When you pray, unfold your heart, and lay it bare before God, and then you have a Father who sees what no man can see, and He will pour in the balm of His healing and the oil of His comfort and the wine of His joy. Then you will have inner peace and confidence even though all the external circumstances may disguise it and all the outward appearances may fail to show it. When you pray, remember that you are coming before God, who sees the secret motives and purposes of your prayers.

2. When You Pray, Remember Who This God Is

To Whom You Are Praying

Here is involved our essential trust, and this trust must rest in God, who is our Father in Jesus Christ. If not, then you are indulging in vain repetitions and the reciting of words and are not praying at all. If God is still the unknown god as far as you are concerned, you are going to have difficulty in praying, because you will have no certainty as to whether God hears or not, or whether He is even interested in and cares about you.

If God is still only the god of your own devising, the kind of god that you think out and dream him to be, then you will scratch and scrape around until you have accumulated enough merit to satisfy him or until you can gather enough treasure to open his ears to your pleas and direct his eyes to your needs.

Only if you have faith in Jesus who says, *He who has seen Me has seen the Father*;² only if you know Jesus as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world; only if you know God in Christ as the Forgiver of sins and the Justifier of the ungodly; only then can you come to God without fear or doubt. You will then have complete confidence that since God is your Father in Christ, He is even more willing to hear you than you are to pray.

You cannot say, "Dear Father" in your praying unless in faith you can say of Jesus Christ, my perfect Saviour, my blessed Redeemer.

See what such faith in Christ does for you when you pray. You know that you can come and are welcome because you are coming through Jesus, in whom God is your Father, who has loved you with an everlasting love.

You do not have to try to persuade God into something that He is not willing to do. He is your Father, and what more endearing term could He have given Himself to show you His willingness that we cannot even imagine. Nor do you have to go into lengthy explanations of your needs, giving this Father all manner of prescriptions as to how and when He should help. This Father is God, and He knows what things you have need of even before you ask Him.

That is why we can pray only in the light of the Cross, for there it is obvious to faith that God is still God and sin is still sin. But it is faith which also lays hold on the truth that God is the Father who loved us even to the death of His only-begotten Son as He laid on Him the iniquity of us all. When you pray, remember that, in Jesus, God is your Father who knows your needs.

3. You Must Also Be Sure When You Pray That You Know What To Pray For

In this connection Jesus Himself gives us the Lord's Prayer, not merely as a basis on which we can judge all our prayers, but even the actual words of our praying.

Surely God must love to have us pray the Lord's Prayer, because He put the very words into Christ's mouth with which to instruct us in prayer. But even this prayer can degenerate into vain repetition and only much speaking if we do not pray it from our hearts.

That, however, should by no means prevent us from praying this prayer often, no matter what else we might pray besides. Even with our limited understanding we are to approach it with simple faith in Jesus as the Lover of our souls, who has our best interests at heart and so would urge us to pray only for the highest blessings.

When you pray, pray *"Our Father who art in heaven."* This means that you will pray with boldness and confidence because you trust that God is both willing and able to grant your requests. This also reminds you of what a dreary thing this life is here on earth, because here we are separated from our Father who is in heaven. We are orphans in the full sense of the word, as far as this world is concerned, strangers and pilgrims who have no lasting city on earth. We are only on our way through life to our true home where our Father is.

"Father, hallowed be Thy name." This is the essence of the entire prayer that Jesus teaches, because all life must be directed to the glory of God. If this is not done life is not life and ends in perdition. Since we must pray that God's name and honour be first and foremost in our lives, we also have here an implied but very real confession of sin. We must pray that God's name be revered, because we do not revere it, and what more shameful sin can we confess of ourselves than that we dishonour and disgrace the name of our dear Father.

So, Father, establish Your kingdom, Your rule, and Your reign in us and among us, that we may no longer think in terms of self and act for purposes of self, but rather in terms of Your name and for purposes of Your glory.

You may then pray with thoughts such as these: "to this end break and hinder everything within and outside my own self that would prevent Your will

from being done on earth as it is done in heaven. Empty me of my self-will by whatever means, that I may have no other will except Yours, that You would be glorified in me and through me.

Give me each day my daily bread, providing me with what I need to keep alive, and richly of Your grace, giving me whatever is needed that I may truly glorify You. But I still fall short of anything and everything that You ask of me. Therefore do not count my sins against me lest I perish as I have deserved. Forgive me all my sins for Jesus' sake.

And since I live in a world like this which is fraught with so many temptations to despise You and fall from You, keep me from being tempted into denying You and doubting Your mercy and despising Your grace.

And finally, Father, also deliver me from all this evil by taking me to Yourself in heaven. Yours is the only kingdom to whom all rule pertains. Yours is the only power, so that You only can grant my requests. Yours alone is the glory, for You alone are God forever and ever.”

Surely God, who is our Father in Christ, will have mercy on us as we lament our sinful, lost condition and will give us all things necessary that Jesus name may be honoured and revered by us, as the Saviour of all people. But Jesus has one more truth for us in this text.

4. When You Pray, Be Certain That You Are In The Proper Condition To Pray

This, too, goes back to our faith in Christ, because it has to do with forgiveness and forgiving. Without any reservations whatsoever, Jesus tells us that God will not forgive us our sins if we do not forgive those who sin against us.

Does that mean, then, that our forgiveness is dependent upon something in ourselves? No, not at all, but rather that our willingness to forgive others gives us certainty that we have that faith in Christ which has brought us forgiveness.

If you refuse to forgive others, then you are magnifying sin into something unforgivable, because it is unbelief, and knowingly or unknowingly you are thereby confessing the same about your own sin. The manner in which you

regard those who sin against you shows what you believe about God and the manner in which He regards all sin, including your own.

Do you believe that all sin has been washed away by the blood of Christ? Only if you believe that, can you be sure that your sins have been washed away also, but are you equally sure about the sin of your neighbour? If not, then how could you preach the Gospel to him?

Only as you can tell all People, ¹⁶ ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”***³ Only so, can you be sure that God loved you and gave His Son for you that by faith in Him you might not perish but have eternal life.

But are you going to sin all over again by declaring that you are greater than God? God loves you, and for Jesus’ sake God forgives you, but you won’t forgive others? Never! Forgiven sinners are always forgiving Christians.

“Glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s,” also by demonstrating in your own person how God is. Be like God to your fellow man by forgiving him as surely as God has forgiven you. When you pray, be sure that you are praying to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as you plead for nothing but mercy on sinners whom you yourself have already forgiven.

May our Father in heaven, who knows our needs, for Jesus’ sake give us sincere hearts, trusting hearts, God-honouring hearts, forgiving hearts, when we pray. So when we pray in this way God will be glorified through our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Mark 10:51

² John 14:9

³ John 3:16