

The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels

LESSON XIV: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT — PART 8: THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE KINGDOM IN PRACTICE

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	related passages
6:1-18				

There is a close connection between the two chapters: Jesus continues to speak of the righteousness of the kingdom, and there are continued contrasts between the righteousness of the kingdom and the righteousness of the Pharisees (Matt 6:2,5,16). The transition is from what the Pharisees were *teaching* (Matt 5:21-48) to what they were *practicing* (Matt 6:1-18). While the Pharisees are never removed from view entirely, they are not mentioned specifically after Matt 6:19.

Several have summarized what Jesus is teaching in this section by the “*golden rule*”: to love God above everything else and to love your neighbor as yourself. This section could be divided therefore with the theme of our loving God (Matt 6) and loving our neighbor (Matt 7:1-12). “In [Matt 6] Jesus demands the sincere devotion of the heart to God (v1-18), and undivided trust in this heavenly Father amid all circumstances (v19-34); for, if man is to love the Father sincerely, then *to* Him he will surrender everything, and *from* Him he will expect everything.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

Acts of Righteousness

v1 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. : Many versions read “do not your righteousness before men”. This reading is said to have the strongest textual support and therefore serves as a header to the entire section rather than limited to this particular example. What Christ is introducing here is three expressions of “righteousness”: almsgiving (v2-5), prayer (v6-15), and fasting (v16-18). **Whether Christ said righteousness or alms makes no difference** as Adam Clarke comments in his writings: “Mr. Gregory has amply proved *righteousness* was a common word for alms among the Jews.... The following passages from Dr. Lightfoot show that it was thus commonly used among the Jewish writers: ‘It is questioned,’ says he, ‘whether Matthew wrote *alms* or *righteousness*. I answer: ‘That, our Savior certainly said *righteousness* I make no doubt at all; but, that that word could not be otherwise understood by the common people than of *alms*, there is as little doubt to be made. For although the word, according to the idiom of the Old Testament, signifies nothing else than *righteousness*; yet now, when our Savior spoke these words, it signified nothing so much as *alms*.’” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Does what Christ say here conflict with Matt 5:16? As mentioned in lesson 40, **the difference being emphasized is one of attitude and motivation behind our works.** In Matt 5:16 the goal of letting our light shine before men was that the world would glorify our Father in heaven. Here Jesus’ point is that hypocrites do their works to receive the glory themselves which He immediately condemns. **“The two places may be combined in a general rule thus: show when tempted to *hide*, hide when tempted to *show*.”** [Bruce, *Gk NT*] **“Alms may be given publicly, but not for the sake of publicity.** It is important that we have a right aim; for if we obtain the result of a wrong aim, our success will be a failure. If we give to be seen, we shall be seen, and there will be an end of it.” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*] “Our Lord does not forbid public alms-giving, fasting, and prayer, but simply censures those vain and hypocritical persons who do these things publicly that they may be seen of men, and receive from them the reputation of saints, etc.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

None will receive a heavenly reward by doing these “acts of righteousness” with the motive of being praised by others. “The preposition means *with, by the side of*; so that the true sense is, *reserved for you and awaiting you by the side of your Father.*” [Vincent, *Word Studies*] One reason for doing such is that any works done in such a manner is a case of fraud, for all religious acts are done at least to look like we want to glorify the Lord. The act the part of giving glory to God while inwardly doing the act to receive the glory yourself is deception.

Almsgiving

v2 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. : Almsgiving is the Gk word ἐλεημοσύνη (eleēmosunā) and comes from the words “mercy, the outward manifestation of pity” (eleos) and “merciful, active compassion” (eleāmōn). **Almsgiving may therefore be defined as acts of mercy, acts of benevolence.** The word for “merciful” is only used twice in scripture, once in the beatitudes (“blessed are the merciful”) and once to describe Christ (who is a “merciful and faithful High Priest”, Heb 2:17). Our word found here is used fourteen times in the NT, 13x translated “alms” and one time translated “almsdeed”. Wuest: “*Therefore, whenever you are practicing the virtues of mercy or beneficence...*”. NIV: “*So when you give to the needy...*”.

That almsgiving was a part of the Jewish religion is well attested; in fact, the Jews took pride in it. In Christ’s day relief for the underprivileged was provided by the religious community, each being taxed according to his ability. This was supplemented with freewill offerings. These voluntary gifts were announced publically in the synagogues and, as Jesus says here, in the “streets” (i.e.

the alleyways in which the poor were accustomed to gather).

Note Jesus is not here telling us to give to the poor, such giving is presumed to be already happening. Giving to the poor is demanded by God (Ex 23:10,11; 30:15; Lev 19:10; Deut 15:7-11), the exhortations of the prophets (Jer 22:16; Dan 4:27; Amos 2:6,7), and taught by Jesus Himself (Matt 7:12; Lk 6:36,38; 21:1-4; Jn 13:29; Gal 6:2) therefore He had every reason to believe His followers would be those who “give alms”.

The reference that Jesus makes of the trumpet blast may be taken several ways:

- the boxes used for collecting offerings for the poor had funnel-like holes in which the money was dropped. These holes were crooked to prevent theft, were wide at one end and grew gradually narrow on the other, and were actually termed “trumpets” by the rabbis. It is said some would throw his money in with some force to attract the attention of those around him, thus he was “sounding the trumpet”. While this is an interesting explanation and may be possible, it does not answer how this would be done in the streets as well as in the synagogues.
- Jesus could have referred to a literal trumpet blasting which announced the giving. “It is very likely that this was literally practiced among the Pharisees, who seemed to live on the public esteem, and were excessively self-righteous and vain. Having something to distribute by way of alms, it is very probable they caused this to be published by blowing a trumpet or horn, under pretense of collecting the poor; though with no other design than to gratify their own ambition. There is a custom in the east not much unlike this.” [Clarke, *Commentary*] This again is a possible explanation but even Clarke admits, “It must be granted, that in the Jewish writings there is no such practice referred to as that which I have supposed above, viz. blowing a trumpet to gather the poor, or the poor blowing a horn when relieved.”
- The interpretation I prefer is that Jesus was probably not speaking literally when He spoke of the trumpet blasts. “There seems to be no trace of any such custom on the part of almsgivers, so that the expression must be taken as a figurative one for making a display.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

Whatever explanation one accepts is immaterial; the thrust of Jesus’ teaching is that **the Pharisees did everything within their power to advertise the gift. It is this practice that the Lord condemns. “Pride and hypocrisy are the things here reprehended....** Works of charity and mercy should be done as much in private as is consistent with the advancement of the glory of God, and the effectual relief of the poor.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Jesus described these men as hypocrites (Gk ὑποκριταὶ , hupokritai), a word used twenty times in the NT *by our Lord only* and always transliterated as “hypocrite”. The word probably comes from a word meaning “to answer, to reply”. **The word came to mean “play-acting, the dialogue spoken by actors in a play”; the noun form meaning “play actor”.** “It was a custom for Greek and Roman actors to speak in large masks with mechanical devices for augmenting the force of the voice; hence the word became used metaphorically of a dissembler, a hypocrite.” [Vines, *Gk Dictionary*] “Properly a stage-player, who acts under a mask, personating a character different from his own; a counterfeit, a dissembler; one who would be thought to be different from what he really is.” [Clarke, *Commentary*] “The abhorrence of acting for effect in religion is due to Christ’s teaching. It has not yet quite banished the thing. **There are religious actors still, and they draw good houses.**” [Bruce, *Gk NT*] Wuest: “*do not sound a trumpet before you as the actors on the stage of life do...*”. Therefore, strictly speaking, **no true believer may be a hypocrite in the fullest sense of the word.** Regardless of the failures in a believer’s life, there is a spiritual reality within that believer in the Person of the Holy Spirit. It is the one in church who *pretends to be a believer* that this refers. For that reason a pastor of my knowing does not speak of believers as being “*hypocrites*” but rather as having “*inconsistencies*”. I like that emphasis.

It is important that we notice one of the characteristic of a hypocrite: he is one who does his religious works to receive the praise and glory himself rather than doing his works for the Lord. Let everyone search their own hearts in relation to this. “We must not copy the loud charity of certain vainglorious persons: their character is hypocritical, their manner is ostentatious, their aim is to be seen of men, their reward is in the present. That reward is a very poor one, and is soon over. To stand with a penny in one hand and a trumpet in the other is the posture of hypocrisy. ‘*Glory of men*’ is a thing which can be bought: but honor from God is a very different thing. This is an advertising age, and too many are saying, ‘Behold my liberality!’ Those who have Jesus for their King must wear his livery of humility, and not the scarlet trappings of a purse-proud generosity, which blows its own trumpet, not only in the streets, but even in the synagogues.” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

When Jesus states they “have their reward” He uses a word which gives the meaning “they have their reward in full” giving the sense of “there is nothing more to receive, no future reward awaits them.” “The word translated *have* in v2,5,16 (apechousi) is used in Hellenistic Greek in receipting bills, and indicates that payment has been made *in full*.” [Tasker, *Matthew*] Wuest: “*Assuredly, I am saying to you, they have their reward and the receipt for the same in full.*” **Their motive behind their works were to be rewarded with the honor, admiration and praise of men and they therefore receive everything they will ever receive here on earth.** They never did it as unto the Lord in the first place, so no heavenly reward awaits them.

v3,4 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly. : this hits home even harder: **not only are we not to do our works to seek praise from others, it is also wrong to praise oneself!** “The two hands almost always act in unison. Together they often lift, carry, and catch things. They are together in work and in play. They can therefore be viewed as being thoroughly

acquainted with each other. Whatever the one does, the other knows. Symbolically speaking therefore, for the left hand *not* to know what the right hand is doing means total lack of acquaintance, utter ignorance. And since the hands are part of the person, the expression probably refers to the fact that as much as possible a person must keep his voluntary contribution a secret not only to others but even to himself; that is, he should forget about it, instead of saying in his heart, ‘what a good man, woman, boy, girl am I!’ [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] “In many cases, works of charity must be hidden from even our nearest relatives, who, if they knew, would hinder us from doing what God has given us power and inclination to perform. We must go even farther; and conceal them as far as is possible from ourselves, by not thinking of them, or eyeing them with complacency. They are given to GOD, and should be hidden in HIM.” [Clarke, *Commentary*] “Let not even thy left hand, if possible even thyself, know, still less other men; give without self-consciousness or self-complacency, the root of ostentation.” [Bruce, *Gk NT*] “Seek secrecy for your good deeds. Do not even see your own virtue. Hide from yourself that which you yourself have done that is commendable; for the proud contemplation of your own generosity may tarnish all your alms. Keep the thing so secret that even you yourself are hardly aware that you are doing anything at all praiseworthy. Let God be present, and you will have enough of an audience. He will reward you, reward you *‘openly’*, reward you as a Father rewards a child, reward you as one who saw what you did and knew that you did it wholly unto him. Lord, help me, when I am doing good, to keep my left hand out of it, that I may have no sinister motive, and no desire to have a present reward of praise among my fellow-men.” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

The rewards of such actions are future with the Father although there are anticipatory rewards even now, at the minimum in the form of a good conscience, a peaceful heart and rejoicing with the recipients.

Which seeth in secret — “We should ever remember that the eye of the Lord is upon us, and that He sees not only the act, but also every motive that led to it.” [Clarke, *Commentary*] This works both ways: if we do a work outwardly seen as being done “for the Lord” yet our heart is not right, we have lost our reward due to our motive. Yet on the other hand when we serve the Lord we may be misunderstood and our actions misinterpreted by those around us. Keeping the truth of God’s omniscience before us allows us to shrug off those comments made in haste by others. ***The Lord knows our hearts — what else matters?*** A critical principle on living therefore is to do as unto the Lord, making sure our hearts are right in His eyes.

Prayer

v5 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. : While prayers were always appropriate, there were set times among the Jews when the pious were expected to attend to their devotions. Thus there were morning, afternoon and evening prayers (Ps 55:17; Dan 6:10; Acts 3:1). The Pharisees therefore were in the habit of “happening to be caught” in a most conspicuous place in which they had to stop and pray. “What the Lord condemns here is *ostentatious praying*, that is, having one’s private (?) devotions in the most public place, with the intention of being seen and honored by the people.... Their motive and purpose was ‘to be seen by the people’ and to be admired by them. It is this that Jesus condemns. — From this it appears clearly that in the teaching of Jesus **it is the inner disposition that counts**. It is the heart truly and humbly devoted to God upon which the divine approval rests (Jn 4:24).” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] “This hypocritical pretension to devotion is common among the Asiatics. Both Hindoos and Muhammadans love to pray in the most public places, at the landing places of rivers, in the public streets, on the roofs of the covered boats, without the least endeavor to conceal their outside devotion, that they may be seen of men.” [Clarke, *Commentary*] Just a few weeks ago my family and I were traveling to Michigan when we noticed a man standing outside his car facing towards the east. He was not in trouble, his car was not broken-down, yet he just stood there for as long as we could keep him in view. As we discussed this, the only explanation we had was it must have been a Muhammadan facing Mecca (?) during the sunset prayer time. This is the first I had seen this and it coincides exactly with what Jesus is saying.

The principle taught here is again one of motive. Public prayer is not condemned in scripture (2 Chron 6:14-42; Neh 9; Acts 4:24-31), nor individual prayer in a public place. Note neither the Pharisee nor the publican sinned while both prayed in the temple (Lk 18:9,10 — *but also note the publican was in a corner while the Pharisee made sure he was not!*). “Is social prayer negated by this directive? No, but it is implied that **social prayer will be a reality only in proportion as it proceeds from a gathering of men accustomed to private prayer.**” [Bruce, *Gk NT*]

Christ accords the same reward as that of the charity giving — *they have their reward in full*. The design was to be seen and admired by men, and they received their desires in full. That was all the reward they will ever see.

“Prayer also is taken for granted. No man can be in the kingdom of heaven who does not pray.” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

v6 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. : Jesus is not demanding we have a separate prayer room. Homes of that day were typically only one-room houses. Jesus used a word with the intention of meaning to **find a private place for your private prayers**. The word used here is *tameion*, probably related to the Gk word *temnō* meaning “to cut, to distribute”. Related nouns are *distributor*, *treasurer*, *treasury room*, *storeroom*. “Such rooms where precious objects were kept would naturally be found in the most secluded places. So, in the course of time the noun *tameion* began to be used to indicate any very private room or place.... **The main emphasis however is not even on the place of prayer but on the attitude of mind and heart.** Not the secrecy is the real underlying thought but the sincerity. The reason for mentioning the secret place is that the sincere and humble worshiper, one who is not interested in making a public display for the sake of enhancing his prestige, will find the secluded nook

or den to be the most appropriate for his devotions. It is there that he can shut out the world and be alone with his God.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] “If it be indeed to God that we pray, there can be no need for anyone else to be present; for it would hinder rather than help devotion to have a third person for witness of the heart’s private intercourse with the Lord. As the very soul of prayer lies in communion with God, we shall pray best when all our attention is confined to Him; and we shall best reach our end of being accepted by Him when we have no regard to the opinion of anyone else.” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

While I believe the thrust of Jesus using the word for “store-room” is we find a place alone with the Lord, Tasker brings forth another practical “preaching point” from the word: “The Greek word *tameion* was used for the store-room where treasures might be kept. So the implication may be that in the inner room where the Christian regularly prays there are treasures already awaiting him which he can draw upon and add to.” [Tasker, *Matthew*]

The principle being taught is defeated if one begins to advertise this practice. While not praying publically, some believers are intent that others know how much time they spend in prayer. Some pastors as well will assure their congregation that prior to preaching they had gone inside locked doors and spent so many minutes in prayer. Another example: my wife and I were vacationing some years back in the Smokies and attended a local church on that given Sunday. The pastor of that church sat during the offering in front of the congregation and visibly prayed. His eyes were closed, his head bowed and his lips moving. His voice was not too loud but loud enough to make sure the people were aware that he was using the time for prayer. Neither of us said anything but mentioned afterwards that we could not help but think it was more for show rather than seeking God’s face.

Note what God sees He rewards. The reversal of this is true as well but we must be careful how this is expressed. We may not sink into the belief that whenever bad things happen God is judging that person nor when a person has continual “good luck” that is because of their great faith. Ultimately we cannot see the reason behind any of God’s providential dealings and to accuse a believer going through hard times is to fall into the trap of Job’s contenders. In spite of that however there is a truth we must remember: **God providentially controls all things and sometimes when things do not work out it is due to things only the Lord may see.** One pastor made a wise observation once when dealing with a person who felt compelled to the ministry but was hindered regardless of the help provided. The pastor who himself had tried “everything humanly possible” to be an aid to this person said “We must remember God sees things we do not”. *Sometimes* when we do not have the answer as to why things do not work out this *may* be the reason. *Some believers’ character may be more of an outward show than any of their companions may realize.* I know from personal experience when I have not walked with the Lord that no matter what avenue I took the Lord twisted it against me! And again from personal experience, the best thing that could have happened to myself or anyone else going through such circumstances it to **let them go through the troubles and learn to walk with the Lord! We cannot twist that into a self-righteous judgmental attitude, but we should remember when all else fails, the Lord knows what He’s doing!** The practical application is that we as believers should do everything scriptural to help one in need, but if it requires more help than what we may believe God would have us do we must let the thing rest in His hands. Just as we can “hinder” the Lord’s work by refusing to help when we are capable, we can likewise “hinder” by inappropriate interference.

v7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. : Jesus could have been thinking of the Pharisees who “for a pretense make long prayers” (Mk 12:40; Lk 20:47). While this may be so, Jesus specifically mentions the heathen. “The *motive* must be kept in mind. **Pagans pray on and on because they imagine that the longer and louder they pray, the greater also will be their chance of success in receiving what they desire.** The prayer of the priests of Baal (1 King 18:25-29) offers a striking example: ‘They called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon.’ Another example is the prayer-wheel of the Tibetan Buddhists, a cylinder revolving on an axis, and inscribed with written prayers. Is not the rosary, used for example to keep count of five decades of Ave Marias, each preceded by a paternoster and concluded with a Glory Be, another illustration? ... What Christ condemns is the spirit of fear and distrust, which causes pagans, who recognize no heavenly *Father*, to babble on and on, in the belief that otherwise their gods will not be thoroughly informed nor sufficiently placated to grant the requests.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] “For this vain repetition the Muhammadans are peculiarly remarkable; they often use such words as the following: ‘O God, O God, O God, O God! — O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord! — O living, O immortal, O living, O immortal, O living, O immortal, O living, O immortal! — O Creator of the heavens and the earth! — O thou who art endowed with majesty and authority! O wonderful, etc. I have extracted the above from a form of prayer used by Tipoo Sahib, which I met with in a book of devotion in which there were several prayers written with his own hand, and signed with his own name.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

“Vain repetitions” is an attempt to translate an uncommon word in the Greek, βαττολογήσατε, battologāsāte. It is used only here in the NT. Wuest: “*When you pray, do not repeat the same thing over and over as the pagans do...*” Tyndale: “*babble overmuch*”. Knox, translating the Latin vulgate: “*use many phrases*”. Syriac version: “*do not say idle things*”. “Rarely used elsewhere, of doubtful derivation. Some have thought it was formed from Battus, the stammerer mentioned by Herod, or from a feeble poet of the name who made long hymns full of repetitions... It points to the repetition without end of the same forms of words as a stammerer involuntarily repeats the same syllable, like the Baal worshipers shouting from morning till noon, ‘O Baal hear us’.” [Bruce, *Gk NT*] **This is not to condemn repeating ourselves in prayer because even Jesus Himself repeated the same prayer (Matt 26:44).**

Contrasted with this are the prayers recorded in scripture of believers, many of which are very terse and pithy: Moses (Ex 32:31,32), Solomon (1 King 3:6-9), Elijah (1 King 18:36,37), Hezekiah (2 King 19:14-19), Jabez (1 Chron 4:10), Agur (Prov 30:7-9), the publican (Lk 18:13), the dying thief (Lk 23:42), Stephen (Acts 7:60), Paul (Eph 3:14-19), and the many sentence-prayers of Nehemiah (Neh 4:4,5; 5:19; 6:9; 13:14,29, 31). Consider Christ’s High Priestly prayer of John 17; again, not a great

length although it is the longest prayer recorded of our Lord's. Note the brevity as well in the model prayer to follow. This is not to teach long prayers are not scriptural for there are longer prayers recorded (2 Chron 6:14-42; Neh 9; Ps 18, 89, 119). **But what is being said? Where are our hearts during these prayers? This is the emphasis placed by Christ.**

v8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him. : Christ continues by stating **we must not approach our Heavenly Father with the idea that He is uninformed, that He is totally unaware of our needs, that we must give the details of every situation in order for Him to understand.** Jesus says on the contrary, He knows of our needs prior to our even asking.

One who might ask therefore “why even pray?” misses the point of prayer entirely. “Prayer is not designed to inform God, but to give man a sight of his misery; to humble his heart, to excite his desire, to inflame his faith, to animate his hope, to raise his soul from earth to heaven, and to put him in mind that THERE is his Father, his country, and inheritance.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

The Model (Lord's) Prayer		
<i>Invocation</i>		<i>Our Father which art in heaven,</i>
<i>name</i>		<i>Hallowed be Thy name.</i>
<i>God's</i>	<i>reign</i>	<i>Thy kingdom come,</i>
	<i>will</i>	<i>Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.</i>
	<i>bread</i>	<i>Give us this day our daily bread.</i>
<i>Our</i>	<i>sins</i>	<i>And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.</i>
	<i>foe</i>	<i>And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:</i>
<i>Conclusion</i>		<i>For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.</i>

{ adapted from Hendriksen, *Matthew* }

v9 After this manner therefore pray ye: : After having given several negatives as to what prayer *is not*, Jesus gives His listeners an example of what prayer *should be*. An overview:

- **the reason for teaching this prayer** was to provide an example for us to go by. Jesus begins His teaching with “Thus (or, in this manner) you should pray”. The stress Jesus places is that this is *how* we are supposed to pray, not necessarily that we must use the exact words. Some stress the tense of the verb used to teach “you should keep on praying” as if to say we must pray this prayer verbatim again and again and again. “Now it certainly is not wrong to make frequent use of this prayer if the worshiper, when he does this, is able to do it with heart and mind. On the other hand, **very frequent use may easily lead to the sin of formalism which the Lord has been condemning.... He did not say, ‘Use exactly these words and no other’.** The so-called ‘Lord’s Prayer’ is really the *model prayer*; meaning: it should serve as a **pattern for our devotions.**” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]
- **its brevity** : the prayer consists of two main sections: an invocation (“Our Father who art in heaven” and six petitions (some say seven, dividing the “lead us not into temptation” and “deliver us from evil” into two separate petitions). Even if the conclusion be considered, the prayer is only about seventy words long.
- **its priority is the glory of God** which follows in harmony with both the OT and NT. Central above everything else is the glory of God and therefore this prayer begins with this theme: the Father’s name, His kingdom and His will. Afterwards, in second place is our human needs: bread, pardon for sin and victory over Satan.
- “It would be a melancholy account of the chosen people if, after thousands of years of special training, they did not yet know what to pray for. **Jesus made a new departure by inaugurating (1) freedom in prayer; (2) trustfulness of spirit; (3) simplicity in manner.**” [Bruce, *Gk NT*]

THE INVOCATION (WORDS OF ADDRESS): *Our Father which art in heaven, :* At the very beginning of the prayer it is immediately clear that **this prayer is not for everyone.** The privilege and prerogative of prayer is given to those “in Christ”, those who may in truth call God their Heavenly Father. Paul says this is true only of those who by faith have been placed in the family of God (Gal 3:26). While it is true that God is the “Father” of all mankind in the sense that He is their Creator and Sustainer (Mal 2:10; Ps 36:6), the typical scriptural usage is a reference to the Father in an adoptive sense, He that redeems those out from the midst of fallen mankind.

It also follows that **this is a Christian prayer** for there have been those who reject this since it does not mention Jesus nor ends with the phrase “for Jesus’ sake”. This is groundless since while He is not mentioned, even in the very opening His atoning work is implied for only those redeemed by the blood of Christ may call God their Father.

Perhaps one of the dearest truths of all scripture is contained within this invocation: *not only is God the King of the universe, Ruler of all and Master of those servants He’s saved, but He is also their Father.* The citizens of the kingdom are the children. **He is a near, personal, caring Heavenly Father for all those who trust Christ as their Saviour.** So they become not only servants

of the King but also children of God the Father. The illustration often used is that of John Kennedy's days in the White House when his young children would run throughout the highest office in the country, entering cabinet meetings in which you and I would never be allowed to attend. Yet they were permitted because they were coming to see their father. This is the privilege given to those in Christ, to enter the throne-room of heaven itself because our God is our Father. **He is the Creator of all life that sits in the heavens, and that necessitates fear and reverence. Yet He is also our Father. The balance to be maintained therefore is that of boldness but not brashness; openness but not "chumminess".** This privilege must not be abused nor taken for granted. *As our Father He lends an open ear to the cries of His children, yet as the God in the heavens He has the power and sovereignty to answer according to His will.*

"The phrase *our Father who art in heaven* was very common among the ancient Jews; and was used by them precisely in the same sense as it is used here by our Lord. This phrase in the Scriptures seems used to express: (1) His OMNIPRESENCE. The heaven of heavens cannot contain thee (1 Kings 8:27). (2) His MAJESTY and DOMINION over His creatures. Art thou not God in heaven, and rulest Thou not over all the kingdoms of the heathen? (2 Chron 20:6). (3) His POWER and MIGHT. Art thou not God in heaven, and in Thy hand is there not power and might, so that no creature is able to withstand Thee! (2 Chron 20:6). Our God is in heaven, and hath done whatsoever He pleased. (Ps 115:3). (4) His OMNISCIENCE. The Lord's throne is in heaven, His eyes behold, His eye-lids try the children of men. (Ps 11:4). The Lord looketh down from heaven, He beholdeth all the sons of men. (Ps 33:13-15). (5) His infinite PURITY and HOLINESS. Look down from Thy holy habitation, etc. (Deut 26:15). Thou art the High and Lofty One, Who inhabiteth eternity, Whose name is holy. (Isa 57:15)." [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Believers are reminded in this opening that **our Father is in heaven and this world is not our home.** We are pilgrims and citizens of a heavenly country. Our home lies in eternity. When we forget that fact we tend to take root down here where we should not. Christ therefore teaches us to pray in such a manner that reminds us of our pilgrimage every time we do pray.

THE FIRST PETITION: *Hallowed be Thy name.* : The name in ancient times was more than something used to distinguish one person from another but often an expression of the very nature of the person so indicated, or his position, etc. We have already seen this in our gospels study in that Levi changed his name upon becoming a disciple of Christ, and Jesus as well told Simon that he was to be given the name of Peter. These were reflections upon who these men were and not merely names as we consider them in our culture. Abram became Abraham, Jacob became Israel, Saul became Paul. Therefore **God's name is God Himself as revealed in all His works.**

To hallow God's name is to hold it in reverence; hence to hold Him in reverence, to honor, glorify, praise and exalt Him. This is more than verbiage; it requires a contrite and humble spirit, one broken by the Spirit of God to be submissive to the Father. Again, the implication is this is true of only believers (and sometimes it seems very few of those!). The believer is filled with gratitude, amazement at His wonderful works, and awe as he looks into the heavens created by the hand of God. "The petition implies a wish that all impiety which pollutes this sacred name may perish and be extinguished, that every thing which obscures or impairs His glory, all detraction and insult, may cease; that all blasphemy being suppressed, the divine majesty may be more and more signally displayed." [Calvin, *Institutes*] "We hallow God's name, (1) **with our lips** when all our conversation is holy, and we speak of those things which are meet to minister grace to the hearers. (2) **in our thoughts** when we suppress every rising evil, and have our tempers regulated by His grace and Spirit. (3) **in our lives** when we begin, continue, and end our works to his glory. If we have an eye to God in all we perform, then every act of our common employment will be an act of religious worship. (4) **in our families** when we endeavor to bring up our children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord; instructing also our servants in the way of righteousness. (5) **in a particular calling or business** when we separate the falsity, deception, and lying, commonly practiced, from it; buying and selling as in the sight of the holy and just God." [Clarke, *Commentary*]

THE SECOND PETITION: *v10 Thy kingdom come,* : The kingdom of God is already here in a sense as God rules in the hearts of those He has saved. This then may be taken in a missionary sense: "*Father, bring in Your kingdom into individual's hearts and lives by their salvation through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.*" This may as well be taken in another sense and that is of a cry of anticipation as we await the literal kingdom of the Lord to be fulfilled on earth: "*Even so come, Lord Jesus.*" It will be at that day when the earth will realize its true king and the Lord will reign supreme. The ultimate realization will come however when after Jesus has ruled and reigned during the millennium that the final rebellion against our God will occur, Satan will be cast forever into hell and the final judgement will occur in which all sin is separated from our presence forever. There will then be a new heaven and a new earth, *this time without sin*, and it will be a never-ending ever-expanding kingdom of perfection, peace, truth, love, and all that is holy and right. This is what awaits the believers as joint-heirs with Christ.

THE THIRD PETITION: *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* : The reference to God's will must of course be of His revealed will for there is a sense that regardless of what happens, it is the will of God and is part of His providential sovereign plan. Yet here we are to pray that man acts according to the desires of what God has revealed. **The believer's desire is for His will to be completely, heartily and immediately obeyed as it is in heaven.** "By this prayer we are taught to deny ourselves, that God may rule us according to His pleasure; and not only so, but also having annihilated our own may create new thoughts and new minds so that we shall have no desire save that of entire agreement with His will; in short, wish nothing of ourselves, but have our hearts governed by His Spirit, under whose inward teaching we may learn to love those things which please and hate those things which displease Him. Hence also we must desire that he would nullify and suppress all affections which are repugnant to His will." [Calvin, *Institutes*]

An interesting side-item worth noting is that it is perfect in heaven (where His will is being perfectly obeyed), therefore saints as

well as the angels in heaven are totally separated from sin. **The very moment a soul is translated from this sinful earth, every vestige of sin is removed forever from that soul.** Wonderful, wonderful day.

THE FOURTH PETITION: v11 Give us this day our daily bread. : Between the previous portion (the petitions for God's name to be hallowed, for His kingdom to come and for His will to be obeyed) and this there is both a connection and a division. The first was heavenly, the second earthly. Yet if we are to fulfill the first we must have the petitions requested in the second portion.

We are to ask for our “daily” bread, a term which Hendriksen says is so rare in Greek literature that it was once thought the evangelists themselves coined the word. It has recently been found outside of the scriptures but again, very rarely and the meaning of the word is not unanimously agreed upon. Within scripture there is little help as well since the Greek word (ἐπιούσιον, epiousion) is used only twice (here and in Lk's version of the example prayer). Adam Clarke states he finds upward to thirty different explanations of the term. Suggestions include “continuous”, “supersubstantial”, “ready at hand”, “for future use”, “for substance”, etc. “A good argument can be made in favor of: (a) ‘give us this day our bread for (or: belonging to) the current day (the day in being),’ and of (b) ‘give us this day our needful bread’, that is, ‘our bread necessary for existence’”. The two ideas combine easily. In any case we must make sure that our interpretation does not run counter to the teaching of Jesus in this very chapter (v31-34), the warning against worrying about food.... The meaning then would be, **‘give us today the portion that is needed for any one day.’** [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] Wuest: “Our bread, that for the coming day, give us today.” Some find in this and other such occurrences evidence that the Lord spoke in Aramaic and used a common word in that language, for why would such a difficult word be used when He was attempting to teach? It would destroy His intent. Clarke brings forth an interesting twist as to why the word is so unique: “The word is so very peculiar and expressive, and seems to have been made on purpose by the evangelists, that more than mere bodily nourishment seems to be intended by it. Indeed, many of the primitive fathers understood it as comprehending that daily supply of grace which the soul requires to keep it in health and vigor: He who uses the petition would do well to keep both in view.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Jesus here teaches us prayer in **moderation**; that is, as disciples we must ask for bread not luxuries. “Father, please meet our *needs* not our *greeds*”. Agur in the book of Proverbs puts it this way: **“Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown You and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.”** (Prov 30: 8,9)

Not only is moderation taught but **trust** as well in a Heavenly Father who cares and meets our needs. It should be noted however that this is not teaching against *preparation for the future* but rather *anxiety about the future* as if we had no heavenly Father.

Along with moderation and trust is our **total dependence**, an understanding that whatever we may have in the way of earthly goods, our entire being depends upon the goodness of God. As we have witnessed in our country these last few years, it takes very little in the way of bad weather or “natural catastrophes” to throw the entire balance of provisions into tumult. Without doubt we in “bountiful America” need to return to the truth of everything coming from the hand of God. **It's not “Mother Earth” but “Father God”!**

Combined with these thoughts is **humility** for Christ says we are to *ask* for these provisions: “give us this day...”. Regardless of how hard we work for our provisions and how much money may have been used in buying these things, as we sit at the table we are always reminded **we have these things by the grace of God.**

Willingness to work is presupposed within the petition as well for who would be so unbalanced to believe we are to ask then sit for the provisions to fall from the sky (2 Thes 3:10)?

Christ also emphasizes **generosity** by telling us not to pray “give me” but “give us our daily bread.” Who is included within this “our” is unsure: our immediate physical family? Our church family? The needs of the family of God? Whatever the limitations (or lack of), the teaching is to care for those other than “me, myself and I”. **Perhaps the reason why God does not bless us more abundantly is that we often forget the needs of others** (James 4:3).

THE FIFTH PETITION: v12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. : This brings forth a principle confused by some: **while in one sense believers have been justified, given the righteousness of Christ and are sinless as far as our state in Christ, we are still human, sinful and require daily cleansing in relation to our standing before God.** Therefore believers are ready for the Lord to take them at any time *because of the righteousness of Christ imputed to them!* Yet daily as we walk with the Lord we fall short of His righteousness and must cleanse ourselves continually to remain in fellowship with our Heavenly Father. If my son disobeys we may temporarily be out of fellowship but he is still my son. **Even if a believer “dies in sin” (which we all do for who is 100% perfect?) they are still received in glory due to Christ's righteousness, not their own!**

Several things are implied within the petition. One is that in the prayer for forgiveness we understand **only God can forgive our sins.** Another item implied is **the necessity of repentance** for none but one who recognizes the fact of sin would ask forgiveness for that sin. Another implication is that **we can do nothing to earn our forgiveness but rather all that is necessary is bound within the atonement of Christ.** “Man has nothing to pay: if his debts are not forgiven, they must stand charged against him for ever, as he is absolutely insolvent. Forgiveness, therefore, must come from the free mercy of God in Christ.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

As mentioned in previous lessons, there is difficulty in the statement “as we forgive our debtors” (see lesson 39). This is one of

several places in scripture with seemingly “reciprocal” statements and some have taken these to teach a receiving from God based upon our merits or our works. **“This certainly cannot mean that our forgiving disposition earns God’s pardon.** The forgiveness of our debts is based not on our merits — how could we have any? — but on Christ’s, applied to us. Consequently, from our point of view, forgiveness is based on God’s unmerited (not merited by *us*) favor, that is, on divine grace (Eph 1:7), compassion (Matt 18:27), and mercy (Lk 18:13). Nevertheless, our own forgiving disposition is very important. In fact, without it we ourselves cannot be forgiven. For us it is the indispensable condition of receiving the forgiveness of sins. That fact is stated clearly in v14,15, which, together with Matt 18:21-35, is the best and simplest explanation of this verse we could ask for. It is with this as it is with salvation in general. We are not saved on the basis of our faith, as if faith had earning power. We are saved by grace (Eph 2:8). Yet faith must be present if we are to be saved (hence, ‘by grace through faith’). **Faith and one of its manifestations, namely, the disposition to forgive, are conditions that must be met and exercised if salvation and its component, pardon, are to be received.** *We must believe, we must forgive.* God does not do these things for us. Nevertheless, it is *God* who plants in our hearts the seed of faith and of the forgiving disposition. Moreover, the power to believe and the power to forgive are from God. At every step — beginning, middle, and end, all along the way — God is both present and active.... ‘In spite of *for*, this clause does not indicate the ground upon which God bestows forgiveness, but that which must be complied with for us to enjoy God’s forgiveness of our own sins.’” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] To quote from lesson 39: **“Our Lord is really saying that I am only truly forgiven when I am truly repentant. To be truly repentant means that I realize I deserve nothing but punishment, and that if I am forgiven it is to be attributed entirely to the love of God and to His mercy and grace, and to nothing else at all. But I go further; it means this. If I am truly repentant and realize my position before God, and realize that I am only forgiven in that way, then of necessity I shall forgive those who trespass against me....** The one condition of forgiveness is repentance. Repentance means, among other things, that I realize that I have no claim upon God at all, and that it is only His grace and mercy that forgive. And it follows as the night the day that the man who truly realizes his position face to face with God, and his relationship to God, is the man who must of necessity be merciful with respect to others.” [Lloyd-Jones, *Sermon*] **Therefore mercy (Matt 5:7) and forgiveness (Matt 6:12, 14,15; 18:21-35) are evidences of conversion. Not that God gives us forgiveness because (“based upon the fact that ...”) we forgive others but rather because we have been forgiven by God, we will forgive others.** Practically speaking (and we have as well mentioned this in previous lessons; see lesson 42 under the heading of “thou shalt not murder”) this may not be perfectly illustrated at any one given moment in a believer’s life. But if a person is truly saved, God will not allow these attitudes to abide in the heart of His children. He *will* work these emotions out.

Why forgive? Hendriksen [*Matthew*] gives the following reasons:

- God so commands. Vengeance belongs to Him not to us (Deut 32:35; Rom 12:19).
- We should follow the example Christ Himself has given us (Lk 23:34; Jn 13:12-15; Eph 4:32; 5:1,2; Col 3:13).
- We cannot be forgiven unless we forgive, as has been shown; therefore forgiveness for others is a fruit and evidence of true conversion.
- The man who injured us needs our sympathy and love. We owe him this love (Rom 13:8).
- Harboring a grudge and planning revenge is not only wicked but also foolish, for it deprives us of the strength we need to do effective work. We should have the forward look (Phil 2:13).
- Forgiving others will impart peace of heart and mind to us, the peace that passes all understanding (Phil 4:7,9).
- Thus God will be glorified, which should be our aim in all we do (1 Cor 10:31).

THE SIXTH PETITION: v13 *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:* : Some divide this petition making the prayer to have seven total. Whether the prayer has six or seven divisions is immaterial and we must be careful to not get lost in the trifles and therefore miss the main emphasis of the prayer itself. A reason for keeping this as a single clause is that the other petitions are divided by the word “and” while this provides a contrast using the word “but”. Therefore, some reason, the first negative is balanced with the following positive, making a single request.

The same question arises which we saw in Matt 5:37 (see lesson 43) as to whether the word “evil” is to be taken in the neuter (as the KJV, NASV) or masculine (“from the evil one”, e.g. RV, NIV, Amplified, Berkeley, Goodspeed, Weymouth, Williams). Again, grammatically and doctrinally there is no difference, and Calvin comments “There is no necessity of raising a debate on this point, for the meaning remains nearly the same.” [Calvin, *Commentary*]

The question has been asked why we need to pray this if God cannot tempt any man with evil (James 1:13):

- “This is **a mere Hebraism**: God is said to do a thing which He only permits or suffers to be done.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]
- one explanation is the Greek word “*temptation*” may be translated “*outward trial*”. “Christians are to pray to be spared the trials which will precede the consummation of the kingdom. The words may perhaps have a more general significance. **‘Give us the necessary strength so that life’s trials do not become for us occasions of spiritual temptation.’**” [Tasker, *Matthew*] “It is a mistake to define this word as only *solicitation to evil*. It means *trial* of any kind, without reference to its moral quality.... Here, generally of all situations and circumstances which furnish an

occasion for sin. We cannot pray God not to tempt us to sin, ‘for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man’ (James 1:13).” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

- an explanation I prefer is that knowing our sinful nature, the petition is a request to prevent us from fulfilling sinful impulses. **The sense is not “God, please don’t place temptation in front of me” but rather “God, protect me from myself!”** We are weak and sinful. Many times when we pray for help in a bad situation, if the truth were known we would see we freely and willingly *walked* into that situation. “To some it seems rude and harsh to ask God not to lead us into temptation, since, as James declares (James 1:13), it is contrary to His nature to do so. This difficulty has already been partly solved by the fact that our concupiscence is the cause, and therefore properly bears the blame of all the temptations by which we are overcome. All that James means is, that it is vain and unjust to ascribe to God vices which our own consciousness compels us to impute to ourselves. But this is no reason why God may not when He sees it meet bring us into bondage to Satan, give us up to a reprobate mind and shameful lusts, and so by a just, indeed, but often hidden judgment, lead us into temptation. Though the cause is often concealed from men, it is well known to Him. Hence we may see that the expression is not improper, if we are persuaded that it is not without cause He so often threatens to give sure signs of His vengeance, by blinding the reprobate, and hardening their hearts.” [Calvin, *Institutes*]

“Deliver us — a very expressive word: “*break our chains, and loose our bands; snatch, pluck us from the evil, and its calamitous issue.*” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

CONCLUSION: For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. : Textually this portion is missing from the leading manuscripts, omitted by most of the church fathers (both Greek and Latin), and therefore omitted from most newer versions. Luke’s form of the example prayer omits the doxology. Opposing that however is that the doxology is found in some ancient versions as well as in a book that dates to the first half of the second century. **Whether this is retained or omitted bears no doctrinal difference. “It must be admitted that the AV conclusion reflects the spirit of both the OT and the NT. It would be difficult, indeed, to frame or devise a more fitting close.”** [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

The closing doxology therefore speaks of the Lord’s right as Sovereign Ruler over hearts and lives, His power which speaks of not only His right to grant the requests but also His ability, and the glory is reflected in His work of creation and redemption.

v14,15 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. : Following His teaching on prayer Jesus stops to clarify the fifth petition. The sense of what is being said here is reflected in the teaching on v12 (see above). “Athenodorus, the philosopher by reason of his old age, begged leave to retire from the court of Augustus, which the emperor granted. In his compliments of leave, he said, ‘Remember, Caesar, whenever thou art angry, that thou say or do nothing before thou hast distinctly repeated to thyself the twenty-four letters of the alphabet.’ On which Caesar caught him by the hand, and said, ‘I have need of thy presence still,’ and kept him a year longer. This was excellent advice from a heathen; but a Christian may prescribe to himself a wiser rule. **When thou art angry, answer not till thou hast repeated the fifth petition of our Lord’s prayer — Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors: and our Lord’s comment upon it — For if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly father forgive your trespasses.**” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Within these verses our sins are called both *debts* (v12) and *trespasses* (v14,15). **Debts speaks of our sins as that which we owe and for which we must suffer punishment unless payment is made. Trespasses speaks of our sins as deviations from the path of truth and righteousness.**

Fasting

v16 Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. : This is the third illustration used by our Lord to differentiate between true kingdom righteousness and false hypocritical show. From lesson 32: **“Fasting is, in the Bible, either a sign of disaster or of voluntary abasement of the spirit.”** [Cole, *Mark*] “Devout persons in Israel fasted twice a week (Lk 18:12), on Mondays and Fridays, the days on which it was said that Moses went up Sinai; this particular day may have been one or other of these two days.... They were fasting persons, addicted to religious observances in which fasting held an important place.... Moses had nowhere prescribed monthly or weekly fasts. The only periodical fast commanded in the law was annual — that on the day of Atonement. The regular fasts ... were one of those pharisaical inventions which the Jews called *a hedge about the law*, and by which they sought to complete and maintain the legal system.” [Godet, *Luke*] From lesson 21: **“It is mistaken of us to limit fasting to going without food. Scriptural fasting is the giving up of anything (e.g. sleep, food, fellowship, etc) not as a scheduled event but rather by being so spiritually burdened that everything else is secondary.** Time is spent in prayer, study or fellowship with the Father under such a necessity that sleep is forgotten or hunger is not noticed. To skip a meal then sit down to watch a ball game is not fasting.”

Here the fast spoken of is for the express purpose of humiliation, either feigned (v16) or genuine (v17,18). The Pharisees were in the habit of looking intentionally mournful so others could see “how sorry they were for their sins”. *While I can think of none among Baptists who would look so dismal in order to make the pretense of their fasting “on account of their sinfulness”, I can think of many who in word or deed do their best to let others know they are “woefully aware” of how much of a “sinner” they are.* The principle is the same. **If God has so worked on a person’s heart to make them humble and contrite, and they are**

truly aware through the work of the Spirit of their own sinfulness, that person does not make it a habit to parade that impression before others.

As with the previous examples given by Christ, the hypocrite puts forth the show to receive men's admiration, and the Lord states they have received their reward in full.

v17, 18 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. : Jesus neither makes a command to fast nor forbids it; rather He emphasizes their motivation and appearance before others when they do fast. Such a fast is said to be done in secret, paralleling the teaching on prayer and almsgiving.