

WHEN THOU PRAYEST

MATTHEW 6:5-8; LUKE 18:9-14

Text: Matthew 6:5

Matthew 6:5

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

Introduction:

Of all the privileges the saints of God enjoy, perhaps the greatest is the privilege of prayer. To be able to go directly into the presence of the Lord is an honor beyond description.

Hebrews 4:16

¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

To be able to speak to the God Who created and controls the universe, and to know that He has promised to hear us and to answer us, is a blessing to great to comprehend.

Jeremiah 33:3

³ Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.

Isaiah 65:24

²⁴ And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.

When you consider the fact that real prayer is not just our sending words out into thin air, but that real praying is used by God to accomplish His purposes on the earth, it boggles the mind! What a gift we have been given! What a privilege it is, to be able to speak to God; knowing He will hear and He will answer; knowing that He has invited us to be involved with Him in the work He is doing!

But, like anything else in life, we humans can even mess up something as profound and beautiful as prayer. Since the time of Seth in Gen. 4:26, men have been calling upon the name of the Lord.

Many have prayed properly and have seen God move in tremendous power as He heard and answered those prayers. Others have prayed out of wrong motives and have received nothing in answer to their requests.

In these verses, Jesus is exposing some of the problems in prayer that were rampant in His day. He condemns the pretentious praying of the “hypocrites”, or the religious elite of that day. Jesus tells us that their praying will amount to nothing! Then, He tells us how men should approach God.

The Lord gave some cautions regarding public prayer in verse 5.

Matthew 6:5

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

- Beware of wrong motives
- Beware of wrong methods

Then in verse 6 the Lord gave council regarding private prayer.

Matthew 6:6

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

- Prayer is a Priority
- Prayer is Personal
- Prayer is Powerful

Note an example found in Luke 18:9-14

Luke 18:9-14

⁹ And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ¹⁰ Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the

other a publican. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. ¹² I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. ¹³ And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

1. TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE (VS.10)

A. A Pharisee

- He was a spiritual leader among the people. He was known and respected as a true man of God.
- He knew the Scriptures.
- He would have prayed at least three times every day.
- He fasted twice every week. (Matthew 6:16-18)
- He tithed on everything he possessed, even the herbs that grew in his garden. (Matthew 23:23)

This man was a very religious man, considered to be holy by everyone who saw him. He loved the adoration that came his way from the common people around him.

Matthew 23:5-7

⁵ But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, ⁶ And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, ⁷ And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

This man is a picture of many in the church. Everyone who sees them thinks they are pure, holy and righteous. They have convinced everyone that they are the example of righteousness, holiness and virtue. They have even convinced themselves that they are right and everyone around them who is not exactly like them are wrong.

B. A Publican

- He was a spiritual outcast. While he was welcome to come to the Temple to pray in the Court of the Jews, he would not have been allowed to attend the meetings at the synagogue. The other Jews hated him and looked down on him.
- He was a tax collector. He worked for Rome, the nation that dominated and ruled Israel at the time.

This man is a picture of the other element we find in the church. These are the people who do not act like we think they should. They might not dress like we

think they should. They might not do things and say things just like we think they should. Like the publican, these folk are in the church, and like the publican, these folks are often looked down on by the other folk who think they are more spiritual.

2. TWO KINDS OF PRAYER

Both of these men, the self-righteous Pharisee and the wicked Publican, went to the Temple to pray. When they open their mouths and begin to speak, the true character of their heart is put on display.

As it turns out, you really can't judge a book by its cover. The man everyone thought was righteous was really a hypocrite, while the Lord accepted the man everyone looked down on.

Note:

A. Haughty Prayer

Luke 18:11-12

¹¹The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. ¹²I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

When the Pharisee begins to prayer, he is quick to tell the Lord how things really are.

- He brags about his righteousness, by comparing himself to other men. He even sees the Publican praying nearby and talks about how much better he than that man.
- He brags about his religious works
- He brags about his giving
- He tells the Lord how great he is and how well he is doing.

B. Humble Prayer

Luke 18:13

¹³ And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

The publican does not offer any swelling words of self-glorification.

He knows that he has nothing at all to offer the Lord

He knows He is a wicked sinner

When he prays, there is no pride, no pretense, no hint of self-righteousness and there are no attempts to justify himself or his lifestyle in the eyes of the Lord

He just tells the truth, humbles himself before God,
and asks for mercy

He won't even lift his eyes toward Heaven

3. TWO KINDS OF PRIZES

Luke 18:14

¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Both these men went to the house of prayer.

Both of these men prayed, but the outcome was different for both these men. One man got everything; one man got nothing! What happened to them has much to teach us.

A. One Man Was Received By God

The Lord heard that wicked, sinful, hated Publican. God heard his simple prayer and God received him. His sins were forgiven and he went to his house justified in the eyes of the Lord.

B. One Man Was Refused By God

The Pharisee, on the other hand, was ignored by the Lord.

Note:

This parable was told to the Pharisees. Jesus wanted these self-righteous hypocrites to understand that the way up in the eyes of the Lord is down.

- The way to be honored by the Lord is to realize that you are nothing before the Lord.
- The way to be right with the Lord is to realize just how wrong we are.

Jesus wanted them to know that we should never be in the business of judging others, but we should be in the business of judging ourselves.

Close:

One man went to church and left with nothing. He went through the rituals. He judged others by his standards. He prayed his self-serving prayers. He worshiped himself. This man went home feeling good about himself, but He received nothing from God for his efforts.

The other man went to church and left with everything. He didn't make a spiritual show. He prayed a simple prayer. He offered God honesty, confession and worship. He left that church right with the Lord.