

Honoring God



Piety that Honors God

Study Scripture: Matthew 6: 1 - 8

Background Scripture: Ecclesiastes 5:1 – 6; Matthew 6:1 – 18

Devotional Reading: Luke 11: 1 - 13

Lesson 11

February 8, 2020

Key Verse *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.*
Matthew 6:1

INTRODUCTION

This Lesson in reality deals with the issue that there must be a better way of living. In dealing with that issue it answers the question, Why am I here?

The first thing that we should remind readers of is that they are sons and daughters of God, and that when they go to God and communicate with Him they are communicating with God in their position as members of a body of priests, called by God to offer spiritual sacrifices.

As persons in that position with Jesus as the Lord of all who has called us to be part of a different kind of Kingdom, a Kingdom which has its own set of values and its own agenda, an agenda which many writers have pointed out centers on the King we should repeatedly stop, look around us, stop, and think whether our lives are controlled by our own agendas and the things that we want to pursue and not the things that are in the King's agenda, and things that He wants us to pursue.

If we are honest with ourselves we will admit that we have ideas about how we can achieve prosperity, more money, have more friends around us, be healthier, and live a life which we will enjoy and which our families will enjoy. Our own agendas therefore are what drive us to do most of what we actually do.

We have needs and sometimes we do not even know what we need for we are living under illusions and we do not stop to think about what Jesus has to say about what we need.

So we first have to remember what this kingdom of God is. One writer tells us:
"Is it simply the absolute, sovereign rule of God throughout his universe. He *is* God, and I am *not*. He is the one who is in control. King Jesus, his Son is the Lord of his kingdom, and we owe our loyalty to him".

So as we examine our Study Scripture we are looking at what characterizes the people of the Kingdom of God as revealed in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Jesus Teaches about True Worship

As we study we must remember that God the Father not only knows all things, but this passage emphasizes that God sees us. He sees everything. So our Scripture does not have God saying “if” we do “this” and “that”, it says “when” we do “this” or “that”. So all throughout this and other Scriptures we see mention of this matter of “rewards”.

We should be honest with ourselves and admit that we are as one writer says **“distracted people, becoming ever more distracted. We are becoming a people unable to focus long enough to pray”**. And he adds this:

“With the TV remote, you could now easily sample 100+ channels, without ever risking position of the most comfortable chair in the room. And after you have cycled through all the channels, it was time to go through them all over again, always in the goal of finding something better to watch.....

We are now at a point where our technology is reconfiguring our brains in its own image. There is always something new to jump to, something else to give our attention to. But only for ever- decreasing amounts of time. We are, to use computers terminology, completely interrupt- driven. As I have tried to make sense of our world from my own limited perspective, I have concluded these: we live in the Age of Distraction. And distraction is the enemy of prayer”.

Many people to a greater or lesser extent have some desire to be well regarded, esteemed, acknowledged or even praised by others. While some are content with or without this recognition, others actively pursue the applause of men in every sphere of their lives, business, work, social and even in the spiritual sphere.

This relentless desire for recognition, subtle or brazen has been socially acceptable in society before the time of Jesus and up to our day and beyond. Jesus however would have those in the Kingdom understand that impressing onlookers and pleasing God at the same time will not work. Religious activities might be commanded but motive has to be right for any acceptance with God. Judaism had by the time of Jesus been largely reduced to external rituals and practices and this despite the prophets warnings over the centuries that God’s interest was really the ‘heart’ condition of worshippers.

In the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 5 to 7 popularly called the ‘Sermon on the Mount’, Jesus outlined the laws that will govern the Kingdom of Heaven and not surprising they are the same laws given to Israel. Jesus’ emphasis however highlighted the desired ‘heart’ condition that pleased God, rather than the purely external performance of religious ritual that was the order of His day. Jesus pointedly contrasted the true intent of the Law with the pharisaic and rabbinic traditions developed over time. He flatly informed His hearers that *“ ... except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”*

Matthew’s Gospel written particularly for Jewish readers opened with Jesus’ genealogy and Virgin Birth or more accurately Virgin Conception to prove His legal human qualification as Israel’s King. His baptism was the occasion of His divine approval and His temptation demonstrated His moral fitness to reign, (chapters 1 – 4).

As His ministry begins in earnest in chapter 5 our Lord demonstrated that contemporary Jewish teaching and tradition were a far cry from a correct interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Piety that Honors God

All too often scribal teaching did not go nearly far enough. It tended to deal only with outward acts, such as murder and adultery, rather than the inward attitudes and motives that spawned the behavior.

This emphasis on the outward requirements of the Law encouraged an externalism in matters of religious activity with the result the religion was a kind of formalism or ceremonialism. Our Lord exposed this error in chapter 6 verse 1 and then went on to give three specific examples in the most common religious activities of his day: almsgiving (verses 2-4); prayer (verses 5-15); and fasting (verses 16-18).

Jesus pointedly attacked ostentation in these religious deeds, warning that the peoples 'show' reflected a bad spirit and confirmed that those guilty of this practice were really hypocrites, involved in theatre. The reality was the peoples' outward behavior stood in direct contrast to their inward state. The mask of piety that they wore hid their true intent which was to garner the praise and esteem of on-lookers.

The Sermon is Jesus' exposition of what it means to live under the reign of God in the Kingdom of Heaven, Matthew's term for the rule of God, (Matthew 4:17;11:11, 12; 16:19;18:1; etc.); the other Gospels use the phrase "Kingdom of God").

Early in the sermon, Jesus pronounced blessings on those who "*hunger and thirst after righteousness*" (5:6) and the "*pure in heart*" (5:8). A little later, Jesus warned that those who belong to God's Kingdom must have righteousness greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20). The middle section of Jesus' sermon explains those challenging ideas.

Jesus stressed that true righteousness means righteousness not just on the outside but even more importantly on the inside. Obedience to God means not just avoiding murder but controlling anger (Matthew 5:21-24); not just avoiding adultery but controlling lustful thoughts (5:27-30). Genuine purity is that of the heart. Those who live under the rule of God are obedient not just where everyone can see but even in places God alone can see. This leads up to Jesus' condemnation of hypocrites and hypocrisy.

Despite the example of Israel and their failures, Christians are not free of this kind of behaviour, for we create all kinds of images of ourselves, so that we will be regarded as great Christians and good persons. So we too have created distinctives in the area of music, worship styles, the way we speak, the way we walk, the way we dress, which Bible text and translation we prefer, and so on. Behind all the façade is the desire to be esteemed in the sight of men.

Jesus' teachings in the Sermon significantly raised the bar for the requirements of the Law to a completely new level. This teaching was radical to His hearers and certainly very daunting and challenging, even for believers today. It must have been clear then as it is now that it is impossible to successfully meet the requirements of Law in one's own strength. Then as now sinners are in an impossible situation and so Jesus will present Himself as the 'one way' to salvation, the Messiah promised in the Old Testament and the sacrifice that takes away sin.

One comment by this Scholar is extremely important for understanding these we focus our attention on what God really likes and the danger that we face when we stray away from God's emphasis. He states when he examines the incident where a Pharisee and a tax collector went to the temple to pray:

“What is striking about this is the fact that the Mosaic law did not demand these things of the Pharisees. In the Mosaic law, for example, nothing is said regarding fixed times for prayer but the Pharisees and other Jewish people were particularly known for their times of prayer. In the Law of Moses, but one only (reference) is made to the practice of fasting. On the Day of Atonement, the children of Israel were to afflict themselves and fast in token of mourning over sin and repentance for it. And that was once a year. And when we come to giving, there is no indication in the Law Moses that men were to give tithes of all that they possessed. So we have reference here to three practices of the Hebrew people in the time of our Lord in which we have our Lord's critical comment upon them.

I am sure the Lord Jesus would not have disputed the cardinal significance of any one of these practices. It is evident from the study of the Scriptures that fasting is perfectly proper. As a matter of fact, fasting is proper in the present age. We have instances in which the apostles mention it, and in which the apostles engaged in it. Giving, of course, has some parts in the New Testament devoted to it, and giving was something that ancient believers were also engaged in. And for, as far as prayer is concerned, we have many, many exhortations to pray. But unfortunately, these three things which are of cardinal significance, and which our Lord would surely have approved, are things that easily lend themselves to wrong motives. Many pray, but they may pray ostentatiously. They may pray lengthily. They may pray in order that other men may hear their prayers. You often, when you listen to prayers, get the impression that some people are trying to give you a system of theology in miniature while they are praying, and that it is really more directed toward people than God, who has a fairly good grasp of theology himself.

And then, of course, it is possible for us to fast for praise of men”.

Today's Text therefore introduces the first of a series of Jesus' teachings regarding motives of the heart. He focuses on the three most popular expressions of Judaism – alms-giving, prayer and fasting. His plain-spoken directives show us that even the most sacred and noble exercise can be twisted to pander to the flesh. Let Christians be warned that the hypocrisy Jesus rebuked in the Sermon is alive and well in these same religious rituals and other religious practices today.

THE TEXT

Verse 1. *Take heed* ... Jesus introduced the subject of externalism with a word of warning and immediately sets before His followers a principle which underlies the entire section: “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven”.

The principle is: one cannot seek to please both God and man simultaneously. No one can effectively play to two audiences. Either you will please one or the other, but not both.

Note carefully that Jesus introduces this matter of Christian rewards and activity and He comments three times over the term with the word **reward** mentioned.

Unbelievers often say that Christians focus too much on rewards and they state their belief that people ought to be good for goodness sake and not for rewards, virtue being its own reward.

But note that Jesus did not accept that position in His many teachings, for He spoke of rewards constantly in the Gospels. For example we can look at Matthew 5:12

Piety that Honors God

“Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets who were before you”.

So the doctrine of Christian rewards is a genuine Christian doctrine and we should not pull away from that and be scared of pointing this out. As a matter of fact you will note this position on rewards in the very first verse of this chapter.

We should really at this stage point out what Christian rewards are even though we do not know or understand precisely the full nature of the reward promised to the redeemed.

But we do know that these are not necessarily only material rewards even though we know that we have an inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and which does not fade away. One writer tells us why rewards are necessary:

“Well, if there is no goal in life that provides a gain, then the action that we do is in futility and meaningless. If what we do is not good for something, it's good for nothing. And for that reason, there must be Christian reward. Absence of rewards and absence of punishment permits injustice to have the last word. What's the good of being good, someone has said, if there is no such thing as eternal punishment? And so the natural product of the life that pleases God in its consummation is Christian reward, just as the natural product of two people who come to know each other then come to love each, the natural product is present marriage.

And so, Christian rewards are the activity in its consummation, and they are the natural thing which Christians should expect. We do labour with the incentive of Christian reward”.

It appears from their deliberate efforts that some might have equated man's applause with God's approval. Jesus dismissed this myth by establishing the principle that one cannot seek God's approval and man's simultaneously. To deliberately externalize one's righteous acts before men in order to gain their approval and admiration is to forfeit any possibility of divine reward.

... *alms* ... alms is an older English word that refers to offerings for relief of the poor. To show mercy to the poor is a central duty of the righteous who seek to obey the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 15:11). There were deliberate instructions for example that a field should not be totally reaped and that the poor should be allowed to glean.

.... *before men* ... while there are some things that believers should do "before men."

-let your light shine, Matt. 5:16

-confess Christ, Matt. 10:32

we must keep in mind that God is not concerned with only the outward appearance of doing what is right. He also looks to the heart (1 Samuel 16:7; Matthew 9:4). He desires our good deeds to come from pure motives not from a desire for accolades.

...*to be seen* ... the English term "theatrical" is derived from this Greek word (*theamai*), which meant "to behold attentively." The Pharisees were play-acting religion (Matt. 5:20); putting on a show.

... *reward*... means 'to receive a full payment' (Phil. 4:18). The Bible teaches rewards, but on the basis of believers' attitude, not their actions alone (Matt. 7:21-23). A similar phrase in Matt. 6:2 was an idiom for "a signed and received receipt."

Jesus Teaches about True Worship

Verse 2. *doest thine alms* .. responding to the needs of the poor was a divine command (Exodus 23:11; 30:15; Deuteronomy 15:7-11) and was considered a vital element of Jewish religion.

In the Galilee of Jesus' day, there were no funds coming from the Roman government to alleviate the grinding poverty that many experienced. The Jewish community saw a duty in making sure its most vulnerable members (especially widows and orphans) did not starve or go without housing or clothing. His criticism did not target this worthy activity in and of itself, for the early church continued to care for the poor (Matthew 19:21; 25:37-40; Luke 19:8; Acts 6:1-3; Galatians 2:10). Jesus has no problem with poverty relief; He assumes that His followers will practice giving to the poor.

... *sound a trumpet* ... Our Lord's concern here, rather, is that of hypocrisy. To confront this problem, He presents extreme examples of hypocritical behavior in this area. One writer notes: **“One can imagine a rich man staging a parade from his house to his synagogue. Accompanied by trumpeters and lavishly dressed attendants, the spectacle is intended to create maximum exposure of his generous gift. Such behavior is hardly for relief of the poor but for garnering public praise for a rich person—who himself may be complicit in the poverty of the oppressed (Matthew 23:5-7; Luke 11:39-42; James 2:6, 7; 5:1-5). It is a created drama with the rich person playing the leading role: that of a praiseworthy benefactor. The short-lived *reward* for this hypocritical behavior is like the theater crowd's applause: when the hands quit clapping and the sound fades, nothing is left.”**

This phrase has often been interpreted as alluding to the thirteen metal, trumpet-shaped receptacles in the Temple where money was placed (Luke 21:2). Each container had a different designated purpose. You would throw a offering in a certain way and it would make a lot of noise as it clanged around in these metal trumpets. It would certainly get the person making the offering noticed. It could also be a figure of speech of someone calling attention to their religious acts. What we do know is that some went to great efforts to see to it that their deeds of charity were noticed.

Hypocrites are the common target of today's Lesson Text. Various forms of this Greek term occur about two dozen times in the New Testament; the majority of those are in Matthew. A well-known background for the word *hypocrite* is the Greek drama tradition. A hypocrite in that context was an actor, one who played a role and pretended on stage to be a character created by a writer. Such actors traditionally used theatrical masks to define their characters. Such masks were known to the Greeks as “faces.”

So the word *hypocrite* did not have the negative connotation that we understand today. The hypocrites who are targeted in this lesson are play-acting religious roles. These religious hypocrites perform for the audience of the adoring public. They wear masks of piety to hide their hearts of evil (Matthew 23:27). Their pretense may fool the crowds but not Jesus. He knows their hearts (9:4). Jesus never uses the word *hypocrite* in a positive or even a neutral sense, although the larger culture of His day might do so. For Jesus, the hypocrite is a deceiver, a pretender who conceals true motives for actions.

Jesus often exposes His opponents' hypocrisies. Among these foes are the esteemed religious leaders of the Jews: the Scribes and Pharisees

Piety that Honors God

(Matthew 23:13, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29). Jesus identifies His opponents' false representations and lays bare their deviousness. He rips off the masks the hypocrites have been hiding behind, revealing their true faces.

... *reward*... an idiom for 'a signed and received receipt' (vs. 2). One writer points out that the Greek word used for having no "reward" *misthos* as a marketplace ring it is the word for "dues paid" for work; wages. So when you do things and live in a certain way you have been paid wages that you deserve. You can't expect God to pay you again for you have already been paid.

Verse 3. ... *let not thy left hand know* ... Jesus assumes that His followers will continue giving for relief of the poor and He offers an unhypocritical way to do so. As with His extreme example of the rich man's parade, Jesus paints an equally extreme picture of privacy. For a person's *left hand* not to *know* what the *right hand* is doing is a near, if not outright, impossibility! But Jesus often paints extreme pictures to make an extreme point. In this case, giving should be done as privately as possible. This will ensure motives that are centered on concern for others not that of garnering attention for oneself. Just as a dispute or disagreement must be kept at the lowest possible profile (Matthew 18:15-17), so also must our acts of kindness.

The second corrective is personal as we strive to keep our acts of charity private. While we may never let anyone know of our generosity, we may nonetheless be very impressed with our own generosity. Because of this we are not to "*let our left hand know what our right hand is doing*".

At first glance, this teaching may seem to contradict what Jesus has already said in this sermon. How can good deeds be a light to others (Matthew 5:16) if they are to be a secret even from oneself (if that were even possible)? As always, the human heart is the very center of the matter. It seems that we are tempted to hide what we ought to show and to show what we ought to hide! Doing a good deed from the heart, whether in secret or in the open, pleases the Lord. Going through the motions—whether for attention or because we believe that outward actions can save us—never pleases God. We are to give when we see a need and realize we can help not for recognition or praise.

The phrase was not meant to be taken literally. It was a reaction to and guard against religious exhibitionism.

One person provides this insight: "They were not giving but *buying*. They wanted the praise of men, they paid for it."

Verse 4. Aiding the poor is a godly action, showing we love poor people as does our *Father* in Heaven (Deuteronomy 15:7–11; Luke 1:52, 53; James 1:27). By mentioning a *reward* from the Father, Jesus is not saying we can earn salvation by our good works. Rather, Jesus is stressing that God does indeed notice, for He sees all things, even those done *in secret* (Matthew 6:6, 18; James 2:18, 26).

God is the only audience that matters and He will surely be pleased by properly motivated actions. Such actions will be rewarded eternally. That will happen very publicly at the appropriate time (Colossians 3:23, 24; Revelation 22:12).

Attitude, not secrecy, is the key (Matt. 5:16). Often monetary stewardship can be a great witness

Jesus Teaches about True Worship

Note, the contrast is not between the secrecy of the Father's seeing and the openness of His rewarding, but between the wonderful *reward* that the Father gives and the comparatively miserable 'reward' of human approval.

... *reward* ... concern about rewards is legitimate and is even encouraged by the New Testament [Matt. 5:12, 46; 6:1-2, 5, 16; Mark 9:41; Luke 6:23, 35; 1 Cor. 3:8, 14; Col. 3:24; Heb. 10:35; Rev. 11:18; 22:12].

One writer tells us of some of the multiple problems we experience with living for others

1. **First, living for the praise of others makes you beholden to the opinion of others. It makes you more likely to do things or not do things based on what others think about you. Perhaps you are right. Perhaps they are wrong. It gets especially problematic when some praise you for doing something while others criticize you for doing the same thing. When you repeatedly do things based on what others think of you, you're living in fear, not freedom. In this way, some people become addicted to applause.**
2. **Second, if you live for the praise of others, you're likely to derive your sense of yourself based on the opinion of others. But think about it: if you derive your sense of yourself based on the opinion of individuals, who are invariably flawed, your sense of yourself is going to be flawed.**
3. **Third, if you live for the praise of others, you'd be inclined to try to be who you think they want you to be, whether or not that's who you are. You'd be more or less performing for others. In a sense, you'll be deceiving them, as the hypocrites who trumpeted their benevolence were deceiving the onlookers. You can keep it up for a while, as actors can go but eventually, you may start to feel a certain dissonance.**
4. **Finally, if you live for the praise of others what happens when you die? What good is the praise of others going to do you when you stand before God? Do you think he is going to take a poll? Is he going to count up the "likes"? You can trumpet your goodness all you want, but it will do you no good at the last trumpet (1 Corinthians 15:22)".**

It is probably of value for some in leadership to read the statement by Brennan Manning, in his book, *The signature of Jesus* (Portland, OR; Multnomah Press, 1992), 188.

"After I delivered a 45 minute sermon titled "The Victorious Limp" the assembled community of 11,000 rose to its feet and erupted in thunderous applause. My shadow self that hungers for honor, recognition, power, glory, and human respect experienced an instant of gratification. My false self that thrives on the illusion that my real identity lies in ministerial success, homiletic triumph, victories in the vineyard, stellar book reviews and the admiration of others basked in the chorus of adulation. In that fleeting moment of euphoria, God took pity on his poor, proud son. Immediately I was given a vision of myself lying in a coffin. The funeral home had closed, the place was deserted, my embalmed body was lying in the coffin completely alone. I had run out of time".

So for all of us who are proud pay attention to reality.

Verse 5. ... *when thou prayest* ... Jesus now turns to a second act of righteousness practiced by hypocritical Jews of the first century AD and many Christians down through the centuries: prayer. Note that the Bible presents three postures for prayer: standing, kneeling and prostrate.

Piety that Honors God

Thus in Jesus' day, many prayer postures were acceptable (Numbers 16:22; 1 Samuel 1:26; 2 Samuel 7:18; 2 Chronicles 6:13). The problem with *the hypocrites* is not their standing posture in and of itself during times of prayer. Rather, the problem is their attitude of desiring to *be seen of men*.

... *standing in the synagogues* ... Prayer was regularly offered three times daily: "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray" (Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:10; Acts 3:1). Note that the devout would pray wherever they were at the 'time of prayer'. It was not the location that was the issue. For example, prayer within the confines of *the synagogues* would seem to be the ideal place for it, but not if the desire was to be seen and applauded.

Of course some self-righteous leaders would arrange to find themselves in public, crowded places at these set times, so that all could see their piety.

The same is true even of (or especially of) prayer in the temple. And Jesus has a parable in that regard: that of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:9–14). In this parable, the motives of the hypocrite are seen in the content of the Pharisee's prayer:

"God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men.... I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess" (18:11, 12).

This is hardly communication with God! It is merely self-serving praise and self-justification. It is the prayer a trained actor on stage might recite from a script. As with the applause of a theater crowd, the *reward* is only for the performance and quickly fades.

... *corners of the streets* ... shifting location from synagogue to *the corners of the streets* changes nothing. Praise-seeking hypocrites are drawn to public places like a moth to a flame. But for Jesus, motives trump location in all cases and at all times. This location appears to be an effort to capture a large audience for the 'performance'.

The motive is what matters most. Obviously, Jesus was not condemning public prayer *per se* (15:36; 18:19-20; 1 Tim. 2:8). He Himself prayed publicly (Luke 10:21-22; John 11:41-42). Praying out loud was common among the Jews, though one could still pray out loud in a private place.

Verse 6. *thy closet* ... Jesus describes the sincere, un hypocritical prayer practice in extreme terms as well: prayer should happen in a *closet*. The Greek word refers to a room not intended for social purposes (Matthew 24:26; Luke 12:3). To *shut the door* prevents the possibility of even an accidental crowd.

The *Father* sees into the closet, though, for nothing is *secret* from Him. The only purpose of such a prayer is the true one: communication with God. The prayer does not have to be eloquent or perfect, only sincere (Romans 8:26). God *shall reward* such praying by listening and caring *openly*. We are not to seek the approving nod of men, but to desire intimate fellowship with God.

Verse 7. Jesus now expanded His teaching on prayer beyond that of hypocritical practices. His next target was those that had adopted certain heathen practices in their prayers. Pagans saw their gods as having human weaknesses and they could be moved to action by long, wordy, repetitious prayers.

Jesus Teaches about True Worship

... *use not vain repetitions* ... the idea behind their prayer blabber was that such repetition would grab the gods' attention and wear them down. Eventually the god gives in to grant the request. This is a little like the parent who says no to a child's request a hundred times, then finally yields with a yes simply to get the child to be quiet. Because the gods are seen as not inclined to listen or care, one needs to say a lot, over and over, in hopes of receiving a response, (1 Kings 18:26, 27).

We see this in Elijah's mocking of the prayers of the prophets of Baal. At the famous contest on Mount Carmel, those prophets leaped on their altar and shouted to their god from early morning until noon. Elijah encouraged these rival prophets to pray louder and more vigorously, because their god may have been busy, or sleeping, or on a journey

Then Elijah prayed a brief prayer to God. "*Then the fire of the Lord fell*" from the sky to consume his sacrifice (1 Kings 18:38). Elijah was in public, but his prayer was not a look-how-great-I-am show. His desire was for the Lord to show himself as the only God who listens and acts (18:36).

This is the kind of prayer Jesus teaches His followers to pray. His instructions contrast with pagan fears that their gods are not inclined to listen. God hears even a few words (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

... *use not vain repetitions* ... another error in the matter of prayer was that of verbosity; senseless, thoughtless repetition. All of us are aware of prayers of our own of this type. Ironically, the Lord's prayer is often 'prayed' in this mindless repetition.

The Jews of Jesus' day had adopted certain prayers that were recited at particular times, some of which were quite long and were memorized. Undoubtedly some offered these prayers in sincerity but many would mindlessly speak by rote.

The phrase *vain repetitions* does not mean that we should not be persistent in prayer (Luke 18:1–8). Jesus Himself prayed long prayers (Luke 6:12), and He repeated Himself in prayer (26:44). These practices were not the objects of His criticism. He was attacking the idea that the length of a prayer makes it efficacious. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus will repeat His own prayer (Matthew 26:39, 42, 44). It is all the pointless babble that we are to avoid.

Verse 8. *your Father knoweth* ... unlike fictitious, heathen gods, our *Father* does not need to be convinced of our needs. He already knows them (Matthew 6:31, 32). Some have logically asked, "Why, then, ask God for anything since He already knows what we need?" Prayer is a way of developing a relationship with God.

Essentially we pray for the same reasons children speak to their parents: to share concerns, to have fellowship, to obtain help, and to express gratitude, among other reasons.

Surely, God himself is not psychologically needy, desiring for us to ask to satisfy something lacking in His personality. The point is that praying helps us learn to trust that He already knows what we need *before we ask*.

We do still bring our petitions before the Lord (Matthew 6:9–13). But what are proper things to ask God for, and what are improper? We dare not treat prayer as if we are on the lap of the department store Santa, giving him our Christmas list (James 4:3). Yet we should be bold to ask God for those

Piety that Honors God

things we need (Hebrews 4:16). We ask God because we believe that He cares. We ask because it positions us properly within His will. It meets His desire that our relationship with Him would grow and flourish. God wants us to share our hearts with Him.

CONCLUSION

Never forget that your Father knows you and everything about you. He has as Isaiah the prophet says, ENGRAVED you the palm of His hands.

When Elijah faced the pagans on Mount Carmel and they spent all day calling to their gods, dancing around and making a lot of noise but to no avail, Elijah simply mocked them and when it was his turn to call on his God to consume the sacrifice simply said in 20 seconds a few words, and fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice.

So God knows. You don't have to use long words when you're praying and even when you're tired you force yourself out of doing some duty. Just know that when you are praying you are attaching yourself to God and detaching yourself from the world.

Therefore just live for God and not live for the world. God created you, redeemed you in Christ and made you His sons and daughters. He is merciful. So practice deep goodness and give to the needy and pray honestly.

It might not be easy and the road might seem hard. Other voices may seem louder than the voice of God and some might even masquerade as the voice of God. But what God wants you to do is to seek Him and in seeking Him He will take and keep you on the road to freedom and you will feel His pleasure.

Abstaining from food and material things is proper to do when you're wishing to find the will of God. You are not to fast so that evil will come.

So remember that the passage we are studying stresses the word "reward" which will involve doing the will of God and this reward will come at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. God has done a great work in us and it is remarkable that after doing all of that work He is still going to out of His goodness give us a reward for that He has done through us. That is amazing! Absolutely incredible!

Remember that you are in fellowship and have a part in something that God is going to do and that is a great incentive for prayer. God has exhorted and invited us to pray and enter into fellowship and take part in what He is doing. But remember also that He is going to accomplish His will. So be happy and join Him in His great work. There'll be tremendous rewards for you.

How public should our religious acts be? Should we expect public/published recognition when we give to a church or charity? Professional fundraisers tell us that public recognition is important and motivating. But this seems to be contrary to Jesus' teaching.

Public acts of worship are not necessarily hypocritical. The issue is motive. Are we drawing attention to ourselves or pointing others to God? Is our giving intended to draw the praise of people or to encourage others to give? Are our public prayers designed to impress or to lead others to God's throne?

Jesus Teaches about True Worship

Jesus' teaching in this regard is as relevant today as it was on the day of the Sermon. It is still needed in the church and the lives of Christians. Jesus expects His disciples of any era to be different, rejecting the ways of the world. We should not try to impress either God or others.

We all struggle with hypocrisy at some level, whether we call it mixed motives or desire for respect. However, we can examine our hearts and motives as we live to please our Lord. May we seek to eliminate our hypocrisy by foc will using on a true, sincere relationship with the Lord.