

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters
Sermon Series - Focus on Righteousness
Sermon Title - Prayer Under the Microscope
Sermon Text - Matthew 6:5-8
Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

Introduction:

“In the darkness we were waiting without hope, without light. Til from heaven You came running, there was mercy in Your eyes!”

Aren't you glad that Jesus ran to your rescue with mercy in His eyes? And one of the most amazing things about the God of the Bible is that while He is awesome, majestic, all knowing, all powerful, and so many other things, He is a personal God who desires a personal relationship with you and me! In other words, He wants to talk with us if we are willing to take the time to listen, and He wants us to talk to Him if we are willing to take the time to pray! As we begin the part of Jesus' sermon on the mount that will help us focus on righteousness, we will talk about prayer, because I believe that any attempt at focusing on righteousness must begin with prayer! So let's do that right now! Pray!

"Father God, I am amazed that You would even want to talk to me, a sinner. I am amazed that You would allow Your Only Begotten Son to be sacrificed in order to make it possible for me to have a conversation with You! Truly, one of the most rewarding activities of my life is praying to You! I want to thank You for being willing to listen when I pray! And I pray this morning that You would let us come to a deeper understanding of the awesome privilege You have given us to pray! As we put prayer under the microscope, please let Your Holy Spirit speak through me and teach through me. I am Your servant, use me for Your glory and honor today! I do ask that You be with those who are hurting, and for those of our congregation who are in the hospital or at home under hospice care. We pray for healing, for peace, for Your comfort and Your strength. Help us to be there for them in any way we can! I love You and thank You for hearing this prayer! In Jesus Name I pray and believe. Amen!

As we begin a look at the portion of Jesus' sermon on the mount that dealt with prayer, I want to point something out to you! Some might be inclined to chalk what I'm about to say up to coincidence, but I would strongly disagree. I believe God is leading our church to focus on prayer at this season of our life as a church. When Andrew and I sat down back at the beginning of the year and looked at the preaching schedule, we calendared the different topics we would preach on from the sermon on the mount and today was the day that the message on prayer fell. Just a few weeks ago our youth went to camp in Tennessee. Their camp sermons focused on prayer and our student Pastor Dallas had our staff devotion last week and shared some of what they had learned about prayer at camp! Then yesterday at the men's breakfast, Dr. Jake Roudkovski, one of our Seminary professors from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary shared with us a message on prayer from The Lord's Sermon on the Mount! He said Christians should pray more and pray better! When he finished, I told him that I would be preaching for

three weeks on prayer beginning today on that same passage. He was like, "Wow, are you serious?" Some of our guys said I should have just asked him for a copy of his notes! It was really awesome. And with our business meeting tonight to elect our search team, prayer couldn't be more important for our church! Amen? Amen!

Jesus came to this earth with the purpose of living a perfect life and then laying down that perfect life on an old rugged cross so you and I could have hope! Hope of being forgiven, cleansed, renewed, and reconnected to our Creator God! Why we are so special to God is a mystery to me, but it has to do with the concept of God's infinite love! When Jesus gave His sermon on the mount He was speaking the very Word of God to us! Today we're going to hear His teaching on how we have been given the privilege of talking to God in prayer! Jesus puts prayer under the microscope so we can get a better look at what prayer is all about and focus on the important aspects of prayer. Take your Bibles and turn with me to Matthew 6:5-15. We will not cover all of these verses today. Like I said, we are going to focus on prayer for the next three weeks! Just wanted to let you know so you wouldn't get worried about the length of the sermon today! So as Jesus puts **Prayer Under the Microscope** we begin by focusing on the importance of...

The Motive of Prayer

Matthew 6:5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full."

There are so many reasons to pray! There are probably too many to count. But the least reason to pray should be so you could somehow make people think you're super spiritual when that very act would make you "not" super spiritual! It's like Jesus talked about with giving, if you do it to be seen, then that's all the reward you're going to get. Jesus is not saying here that it's wrong to say a prayer in public, it's just that you shouldn't pray in public for the purpose of being seen! As I said, there's so many reasons to pray and we're going to talk about some of the more important reasons to pray when we talk about the content of prayer next week. But let's just be gut level honest about prayer and the motives behind prayer. One of the greatest reasons people pray is need! Most people are motivated to pray when they have a concern, a difficulty, a tragedy, or a question that goes beyond their ability to provide, fix, understand, handle or answer! But the greatest reason of all to pray is a motive that goes beyond all of these things. It addresses a need every human being has, but few acknowledge. And what would that be? The greatest reason to pray is our need for a personal and growing relationship with our Creator God who not only made us, but desires to have a friendship with us. In fact, Jesus says this in verse 6...

Matthew 6:6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.

Do you understand the power of this statement? Pray to your Father! Now, I know some of you may not have had a good earthly example of a father, others of you did, but we all need to understand that our Heavenly Father is a perfect Father in every way, and He desires so much for us to feel comfortable talking with Him as a child would talk to a good earthly father. Did you know Jesus' teaching on having such an intimate relationship with Yahweh God got Him into trouble with the religious leaders. They did not believe that such a relationship was possible between a sinful man and The Holy God! It's understandable they would have this issue. They had been taught to fear God, but what they had missed was that God wanted their love and respect not for them to be scared of Him.

God desired to be close to them, but their sin, pride, and hypocrisy separated them from God. Jesus came to close the gap and make a way for them to cross the chasm that kept them apart from God, but many of them refused. By the same token, it may be hard for us to fathom that the God who created the vast Universe, and made it possible for life to even exist, would acknowledge a seemingly insignificant human being. Now I'm not a scientist, but I'm extremely fascinated by science. I did a little research as I was thinking about how small I am in this universe. Check this out...

There are 100-400 billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy and between 100 and 500 billion galaxies in the Universe and at the low end 10 billion, billion stars!

The question has been asked if there are more stars in the universe or more grains of sand on the earth! Mathematicians love doing the math on this. The truth is no one knows for sure! And here's another thing that will blow your mind. There may be more atoms in a single grain of sand than there are stars in the universe. 50 quintillion or 50 million million million atoms. So when I think of my place in the universe I begin to feel like just one of those 50 million million million atoms in a grain of sand. The Psalmist, way back in the day, had done a little stargazing and felt pretty small as well. Here's what he had to say...

Psalm 8:3 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

Psalm 8:4 what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?

Psalm 8:5 You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.

Psalm 8:6 You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet:

Psalm 8:7 all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild,

Psalm 8:8 the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

Psalm 8:9 LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

So when I think that the Creator of all that there is in the universe, would desire a personal relationship with me and wants to have a conversation with me, I get pretty fired up about that! And the fact that The Almighty, Eternal, all powerful, all knowing, infinite God wants me to think of Him as Father, well that overwhelms me in a good way. So one of the greatest rewards of

prayer is that I get to have a one on one conversation with The God of the Universe, who also happens to be my wonderful Heavenly Father, all at the same time! Listen to how Paul put it in Romans 8:14-16...

Romans 8:14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

Romans 8:15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

Romans 8:16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

So the greatest motive and the greatest reward for praying is that in prayer we have a beautiful relationship with God. In other words we pray because of our friendship and relationship with our loving Heavenly Father and the greatest reward is that we get to have that relationship with the most awesome, loving, giving, caring, and amazing Creator God! That in itself makes me want to pray, but when you add in the really cruel and hard things this old world throws at us, it is very comforting to know I have a Heavenly Father I can run to and jump into His arms and cry Abba Father, Daddy Father! Listen to this quote from The New International Bible version website...

"'Abba', a colloquial form of address used by little Jewish children toward their fathers and best translated 'Papa' or 'Daddy,' opened the possibility of undreamed-of, unheard-of intimacy with God. In any other great world religion it is unthinkable to address almighty God as 'Abba.'"

And now let's zoom in with our microscope and look at...

The Method of Prayer

Jesus continued sharing His thoughts on prayer and said this...

Matthew 6:6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Folks, this absolutely does not mean that the only place you can pray is behind closed doors, or that you can only pray alone. Many times we get hung up on this or that method or way, or place of praying! That's not what Jesus was trying to get us to focus on. That you are praying is more important than the place! And Jesus was not saying that we can't pray or shouldn't pray at work, at school, or over a meal at a restaurant, or that we shouldn't pray in community. He was saying that we don't pray to make a show. Method and motive are closely related! Here's something to ponder when it comes to the manner of prayer: We should be so aware of God's presence in our lives that we talk with Him continuously wherever we are! I don't mean out loud, but just knowing that He is right there beside us when we are working, schooling, socializing, exercising at the gym, you name it, God is there with us. Being aware of that and living and thinking and walking with an awareness of His presence with us is a form of prayer. I love these words of David in Psalms...

Psalm 139:7 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

Psalm 139:8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

Psalm 139:9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,

Psalm 139:10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

And these words of Paul...

1 Thessalonians 5:16 Rejoice always,

1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray continually,

1 Thessalonians 5:18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

And listen to the words of the Psalmist Ethan the Ezrahite...

Psalm 89:15 Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, LORD.

Psalm 89:16 They rejoice in your name all day long; they celebrate your righteousness.

Psalm 89:17 For you are their glory and strength, and by your favor you exalt our horn.

The word horn means strength. When we walk in His presence, rejoice in His name, celebrate His righteousness, and allow Him to be our glory and strength then He makes us strong. So we don't just pray at home or at church. We should live in a state of prayerfulness, but in order for this to become a reality in our daily lives we must first have those times of prayer alone with God. In other words, the ability to pray without ceasing is developed in our personal and private walk with God! Let me share with you this personal example. I talk to my wife in public, I talk to her in front of our kids and grandkids, but some of our most meaningful times of conversation have been when it's just been her and me, alone. Those walks on the beach, or sitting at a table in a quiet little restaurant on an anniversary, or those daily conversations around the breakfast table.

The most rewarding times of prayer are times when we block out the noise of the world, the distractions of the world, and we just get to a place where we can listen for that still, small voice of God. And when He speaks to your heart in those times, it's powerful, meaningful and life changing. Another Psalm in the book of Psalms, attributed to the Sons of Korah, speaks of a place of prayer being the sanctuary or temple of the Lord.

Psalm 84:1 How lovely is your dwelling place, LORD Almighty!

Psalm 84:2 My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

Psalm 84:3 Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young—a place near your altar, LORD Almighty, my King and my God.

Psalm 84:4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.

Psalm 84:5 Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.

Psalm 84:6 As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools.

Psalm 84:7 They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.

Psalm 84:8 Hear my prayer, LORD God Almighty; listen to me, God of Jacob.

Psalm 84:9 Look on our shield, O God; look with favor on your anointed one.

Psalm 84:10 Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

Remember the song: Better is one day in Your house, better is one day in Your court than thousands elsewhere? Now for some people, the thought of being in the very presence of God is a scary thought and we certainly should be in awe and have great respect for God Almighty! Others think that spending time with God in prayer would be such a boring endeavor and they just aren't interested in being in the presence of God for whatever reason. But let me assure you, when you connect with God almighty in His sanctuary, you'll never be the same and you'll find yourself wanting to return as often as possible. And the amazing thing is that the more often you spend time alone with God the more often you will find yourself taking the content and experience of that encounter out into the world with you. And you will find that to be a very rewarding experience as you discover the strength of God flowing into your daily life from your devotional life. So if you don't have a place of prayer, find one. The time you spend in secret with God will be rewarded by increasing your awareness of God when you are in the middle of a crowd. In fact, let me explain something really amazing when it comes to God's house and His Holy Temple! Just before Jesus left this earth this happened...

Acts 1:4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.

Acts 1:5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

That happened on the Day of Pentecost. And then later, Paul the Apostle would share this truth...

1 Corinthians 6:19 Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;

1 Corinthians 6:20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Your Body is the temple of the Holy Spirit! So that means that God is with you everywhere you go and this means you have the opportunity to pray wherever you are at any time and you can now sing better is one day in your courts than thousands elsewhere and realize that God's presence is no longer confined to the Holy of Holies in the temple, but His presence goes with you everywhere! You may have heard of a Christian movement known as Quakers. While I don't agree with them on some things, I very much agree with their belief that Jesus is an "Inner

Light" that helps guide their daily lives. Their commitment to devotion is powerful. One of their leaders, Thomas R. Kelly, who lived from 1893-1941 wrote the following...

"What is here urged are internal practices and habits of the mind. What is here urged are secret habits of unceasing orientation of the deeps of our being about the Inward Light, ways of conducting our inward life so that we are perpetually bowed in worship, while we are also very busy in the world of daily affairs...Yield yourself to him who is a far better teacher than these outward words, and you will have found the Instructor himself, of whom these words are a faint and broken echo. There is a way of ordering our mental life on more than one level at once. On one level we may be thinking, discussing, seeing, calculating, meeting all the demands of external affairs. But deep within, behind the scenes, at a profounder level, we may also be in prayer and adoration, song and worship, and a gentle receptiveness to divine breathings."

So we've talked about the Motive of prayer and the Method of prayer, and we will end our message for today by turning the focus dial on our microscope a little more so that we examine...

The Measure of Prayer

Have you ever thought about how to measure prayer? What are the metrics that judge prayer to be effective or not? Is it how long you pray or the particular words you pray? Jesus said this in our text for today...

Matthew 6:7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

Matthew 6:8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

These verses fascinate me. The pagans prayed to their gods as if they controlled their gods. They would go into long and wordy incantations. They would repeat things over and over as if they were gaining power over their gods so they would do their bidding. Jesus was clear that there is no need for a Christian to ever do that because God knows what we need even before we ask. Jesus was not saying we should never ask God for things. In fact, as we will see next week in the content of prayer, asking God to act on our behalf is a part of prayer. The difference is that we don't have to spend the majority of our time asking. If we know God already knows what we need and we trust that He will do what's best, then a simple, sincere request is all that is required. It's not that we don't repeat a prayer request. We do, but each time we make the request, we need to thank God that we know He has heard our prayer and that we trust He understands things we don't and we believe He will do what's best in the overall purpose and plan that He has for our life and our loved ones. And in His timing!!! We are to remain faithful in prayer and asking, but not as if He has not heard or does not know! We pray, not to inform God of our situation, but to let Him know of our willingness to trust Him and to hold His hand and to never let go regardless of the circumstances. Once we do this we can spend more time in prayer for other important and life changing aspects of prayer. We'll talk about those next week. Jesus gave at least two examples of people making requests to other people and because of

their persistence they got what they wanted. I believe He was showing the contrast between Himself and the world. Listen to this one...

Luke 18:1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

Luke 18:2 He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought.

Luke 18:3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

Luke 18:4 "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think,

Luke 18:5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!' "

Luke 18:6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says.

Luke 18:7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?

Luke 18:8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

I've learned in my prayer life to present my request to God and then thank Him for hearing and answering my prayer even before I see the answer. I don't know how He will answer my prayer, but I can't have peace if I don't trust Him. I've told you all before that one of my biggest struggles in life is having simple child-like faith and trust. I worry about things and at times fall prey to discouragement. Oh, and by the way, about the actual length of prayer. Sometimes I beat myself up because I don't feel as if I've spent enough time in prayer, and I get discouraged about that. But the Lord reminds me it's not the length, but the quality and sincerity of the time. Sure He loves to spend as much one on one time with us as possible and we don't need to neglect that time, but if you get up late one day and you don't have time for your regular prayer and devotion, then say a short prayer and ask God to help you have that beautiful awareness that He is with you every moment and every second of every day! Then look forward to the time when you can head to your secret sanctuary place and fellowship with your Heavenly Father!

Paul put it this way in Philippians 4:4-7...

Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Philippians 4:5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Philippians 4:7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Today we have a most amazing way to be reminded of God's presence with us! When Jesus allowed His body to be torn and His blood spilled, He did so in order to be able to satisfy the righteous demands of God's Holy Law, and to be able to cleanse anyone who would be willing

to admit they have sinned and need a Savior. God's Word is clear on this: If we are willing to confess our sins and call upon the Name of the Lord, we will be saved! Not by our righteousness, but by the righteousness of our Savior Jesus. His Holy Spirit comes to dwell within our hearts and lives and actually takes up residence in our physical body! Because of Jesus' willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice, we have the opportunity to come into the very presence of a Holy God and actually talk with Him in prayer without fear, but with great love and respect. So I would like to ask you now to consider whether or not you have ever made that decision to place your faith in Jesus and what He did for you on the cross. Have you made that decision to confess your sins, ask for forgiveness, and then to invite Jesus into your life by believing in Him and trusting Him as your Savior? If you have then you are welcome to join us in receiving Holy Communion! You don't have to be a member of this church! If you are a member of the Body of Christ through faith and confession of Him as Your Lord and Savior, you are welcome to join with us. If you haven't made that decision, what is standing in your way? If you are willing to admit your sin, believe Jesus died to save you from your sin, and you are willing to call upon Him for salvation, you can be saved today and then remember with us the cost of Jesus' sacrifice by eating the bread and drinking the juice. I'm going to pray a simple prayer of salvation and if you would like to pray with me you can do so today! And if you have already prayed to receive Jesus as your Savior, then take this time to pray and examine your heart to see if there's things you need to commit and give to God so you can be in right fellowship with Him. Now I'll pray that simple prayer of Salvation. Let's pray...

Father God, I admit that I've sinned and fallen short of Your will for my life! I believe You died on the cross for my sins and I ask You to forgive me and to come into my life and help me live a new life through the power and presence of Your precious Holy Spirit! Thank You for being willing to die for me, and now with Your power I will live for You! I pray this prayer believing, in the sweet name of Jesus, Amen!

If you prayed that prayer for the first time today, I encourage you to let us know so we can celebrate with you and help you grow in your faith and new walk with God! Now, I would ask you, if you would like to participate in communion, to leave your seats and head to one of the four tables around the room. Get a piece of bread and a cup of juice and take them back to your seats and then I will give you further instructions. And by the way, there is a gluten free option on the bread if that is a need for you! The worship team is going to lead us in worship during this time!

Paul the Apostle wrote these words...

1 Corinthians 11:23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,

1 Corinthians 11:24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

Remember, while Jesus' bones were not broken, His body was! It was torn so that Jesus could become the spiritual bread of life that you and I desperately need! We eat this bread to remember!

Then Paul said...

1 Corinthians 11:25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

We drink this cup to remember the perfect life of Jesus which was poured out when He shed His blood to wash away our sins. He paid a debt He did not owe because we owed a debt we could never pay! We drink this cup to remember!

Paul then said...

1 Corinthians 11:26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Let's never forget the Lord's most gracious sacrifice that gives us life! Let's sing!