

Matthew 6C

- Today, we reach a passage in Matthew's Gospel that must be one of the best-known Scriptures in all the New Testament
 - In fact, it's my belief that though most Christians memorize little or no Scripture, almost everyone has memorized this passage
 - It's a prayer we call the "Lord's Prayer"
 - And the fact that so many of us can recite this prayer by heart is particularly ironic, given what Jesus teaches about it
 - But before we get to the prayer, let's remember the context of Jesus' teaching
 - And you probably won't find a passage in the New Testament where context is more crucial to a proper interpretation of the text
 - Because we lack an appreciation for the context, many people are doing the very *opposite* of what Jesus' commanded here
- So let's begin with the big picture...Jesus is teaching on the side of a mountain near the Galilee
 - He's in the middle of a sermon to set the record straight on the Kingdom and righteousness
 - Chapter 5 taught us the proper biblical view of obtaining the Kingdom, that is, being righteous enough to enter Heaven
 - And now in Chapter 6, Jesus is explaining the correct way to live as a Kingdom-bound citizen while we await the Kingdom
 - Jesus summarizes the theme of Chapter 6 neatly in v.1

Matt. 6:1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

- So Jesus' concern is that we live-out the righteousness we received by faith in the proper way, so we may receive a full reward in the Kingdom
 - We live-out righteousness as a testimony to a lost and dying world

- But we must be careful not to do so in the hope of receiving the praises of that lost and dying world
 - Instead, we should practice righteousness to please the Lord alone
 - And Jesus said He will take note of our good works done with the proper heart and reward us in the Kingdom
- In both chapters, Jesus gives examples of how the Pharisees corrupted the proper understanding of these things
 - Here, we're looking at four examples that touch on basic areas of spiritual life: giving, prayer, fasting and wealth
 - These four also happened to be practices that the Pharisees had especially perverted for selfish purposes
 - Last week, we looked at Jesus' first example of giving to the poor, and the issue came down to the heart of the giver
 - We learned that if we go about our giving, so as to receive earthly gain in one form or another, then Jesus says we are hypocrites
 - And God does not reward hypocrisy
 - Instead, Jesus said we should guard our hearts from pride and ego by keeping all our giving secretive
 - And if we give in that way, then we preserve our opportunity for the Lord to reward us in the Kingdom
 - Once again, the issue for God was the state of our *heart* as we give, not merely *did* we give
 - That's the general context for this entire chapter
 - What is our heart's attitude as we conduct ourselves in these four areas of spiritual life?
 - We can go through the motions and for appearances' sake
 - And perhaps we'll receive praise from people who observe us and think we're so pious and holy
 - But God knows our heart and will not reward a false heart

- So now, understanding that context, let's look at Jesus' second example on prayer

[Matt. 6:5](#) "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

[Matt. 6:6](#) But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

[Matt. 6:7](#) "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

[Matt. 6:8](#) "So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

- Jesus says when we pray, there is a right way and a wrong way to do it
 - But first, take a moment to notice the preposition Jesus uses in v.7
 - He doesn't say *if* you pray; He says *when* you pray
 - I could preach for a while on the necessity of regular prayer
 - In fact, I could preach for weeks on this topic
 - But, as I said last week on the topic of giving, I'm constrained by this text
 - Jesus raises these issues to address a very specific point
 - And I'm here to teach you Jesus' point, not to substitute my own point
 - So in the matter of prayer, I'm going to focus on what Jesus wants to say on the matter
 - And His point is on the heart of the one praying
 - Are we praying merely to impress other people, or are we praying to communicate with our Father in Heaven?
 - One way is wrong and gains nothing from God, while the other way is correct and gives opportunity to hear from God
- In v.7, Jesus says the wrong way to pray invariably involves using meaningless repetition of words

- Jesus says do not engage in such ritualistic, meaningless repetition...
 - Do not recite the same words over and over again
 - Jesus says that is *not* prayer at all
 - It's mantra, a chant
- The word in Greek translated as "meaningless repetition" in our Bibles is actually the word for "babbling" or "stammering"
 - It refers to the sound that an 18-month old baby makes as it babbles
 - So when we revert to mindless repetition of words, that's how God hears us: like a parent listening to a babbling infant
 - It's meaningless and it's useless...and it's not prayer
- Jesus dismisses such tactics as praying the way Gentiles pray, which was a derogatory statement
 - To understand what Jesus is saying, you have to remember that Jesus was a Jew speaking to a Jewish crowd
 - And at this point in history, only the Jewish people had received the revelation of the true God, Jehovah
 - The Gospel hadn't yet gone out to the world, so only the Jewish people had a relationship with God
 - So to a Jew, the phrase "to pray like a Gentile" meant to pray as an unbeliever, as someone who doesn't know the true God
 - And that's what Jesus means...God's children should not approach our Father in Heaven in prayer as if we don't know Him
 - Using meaningless repetition and calling it "prayer" is approaching God the way the unsaved try to find God
 - Buddhists chant, Catholics recite the rosary, Jews recite daily prayers, and many unsaved in Protestant churches recite liturgy
 - And in all cases, the use of meaningless repetition in place of true prayer is the mark of unbelief, Jesus says
 - Understanding this connection between a lack of saving faith and a reliance on mantra, is key to understanding the true nature of prayer

- Prayer is, by definition, a form of communication with God, a conversation that we initiate with the Creator of the Universe
 - It's a conversation that comes from our heart, and like all communication, it has a sender, receiver and a message
 - Obviously, the believer is the sender and the message is the thoughts of our heart
 - It's personal and specific, and it's directed to an audience we know intimately, based on faith in Jesus Christ
- But those who have never placed their faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ don't have a relationship with the Father
 - Without faith in Jesus, they have no intercessor before the Father, no High Priest
 - Consequently, they are like the demons, James says, knowing *about* God yet not *knowing* God
 - In fact, because they lack an intercessor, the Bible says, God does not even hear the "prayers" of unbelievers
 - Spiritually speaking, unbelievers are grasping in the dark, operating without wisdom or understanding, trying to find a God they don't know
 - And therefore, they have no choice, but to resort to babbling, to mindless repetition
 - It's what babies do who have not yet learned to communicate with the parents
 - And it's what unbelievers do because they have not been given a spiritual relationship to communicate with God
 - At the end of v.7, Jesus explains what the unbeliever hopes to achieve from this behavior
 - They hope to make up for, in *quantity*, what they lack in *quality*
 - By repeating words over and over, they expect to impress God with their persistence and devotion to the task
 - They aren't speaking *with* God, they're speaking *at* God
 - It's actually a form of superstitious behavior

- They hope God will reward them for their personal sacrifice of time and effort
- But God doesn't need anything we have to offer – He owns the world – He is not impressed by Human effort
- It's like trying to open a locked door by trying different keys until we find the one that fits the lock
- But Jesus says God isn't impressed with their devotion to chanting a mantra
- To God, their repetition is merely the sound of a baby babbling
- Remember, the Scriptures say that by the blood of Christ, we may approach God boldly with our petitions
 - This is a high honor and an incredible privilege that Jesus died to make possible
 - So, if we take that special opportunity and toss it aside in exchange for mindless chanting, we're trampling the grace of God
 - And we're acting like unbelievers, instead of like children of God
 - This was the way Pharisees instructed Israel to practice prayer, but historically, Judaism never relied on prepared, scripted memories for prayer
 - From the beginning, all Jewish prayer was supposed to be extemporaneous
 - We can see examples of Old Testament characters, like Moses or David or Nehemiah, praying without a script
 - When these men prayed, they simply cried out to God from their hearts, as God intended
 - Yet by the time of Jesus, the unbelieving Pharisees had instituted repetitious prayer, because that's all they knew of God
 - They prescribed prayer books that dictated every prayer a Jew could give under every circumstance
 - Jews had daily prayer books, Sabbath prayer books, prayer books for special holy days, such as Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah, etc.

- Within a few centuries, the Pharisees had transformed Jewish prayer to mimic the prayers of unbelieving Gentiles, as Jesus said
- Mindless repetition took the place of meaningful conversation
- So Jesus tells us not to pray in this way, because it's a hypocritical way to pray
 - When we turn off our brain and revert to mindless repetition, we're merely pretending to communicate with God, without actually doing it
 - We're going through the motions, acting pious and Godly, putting on a show for others or for ourselves
 - Yet in reality, we're checked-out of the process
 - Because repeating a mantra doesn't engage the heart or mind in a true conversation with God
 - On the contrary, it puts our spirit to sleep and gives opportunity for the enemy to influence our thoughts
 - Which is why chanting and similar forms of meditation are such a big part of Eastern mysticism, and are so dangerous for believers
 - We don't have to look very hard today to find true Christians making this mistake
 - In many churches on Sunday, congregations are still taught to recite prepared prayers together each week
 - And many Christian families recite the same meaningless prayer over dinner each night
 - And Christian parents teach their children to chant the same mantra every night before bed
 - A recent book taught Christians that a prayer by an obscure Old Testament figure was the key to unlocking God's blessing
 - The book suggested that we only needed to repeat that same prayer to get what we desire from God
 - It made God look like a genie, and it was complete nonsense and a direct contradiction of Jesus' instructions here
- Prayer is supposed to be a conversation with God, and mantra isn't the same as conversation

- If you doubt me, then try this experiment at home
 - Every time you want something from your spouse, just repeat the same statement over and over again until you get it
 - Some wives in the room are probably saying, "I've tried that Steve, and it didn't work."
 - And some of the parents in the room are probably thinking that's exactly what my kids try to do to me all the time
- Exactly! And when they do that to you, how does that make you feel?
 - Does it feel like they are engaging in a conversation?
 - Does it feel like they are building a relationship with you?
 - Or does it feel like an annoying attempt to manipulate you?
- Now, if instead of trying to wear you down with meaningless repetition, what if your child simply had a conversation with you?
 - They began by making a sincere, well-considered request?
 - Then depending on your response, your child engaged in a respectful exchange, seeking a compromise
 - Perhaps they suggest other options or make rational appeals?
 - Wouldn't you be delighted?
 - Or perhaps you might say, "Who are you and what did you do with my child?"
- Now consider this...in most cases, you probably knew what your children wanted, even before they started their begging
 - And you probably also knew what your answer would be before you heard their request
 - Nevertheless, you still would have been pleased if the child had engaged you in a meaningful conversation on the issue, right?
 - In that situation, the value of the exchange wasn't in deciding the issue, since you already had a decision in mind
 - The value would have been in building a better relationship with them, teaching them to appreciate your wisdom in the matter

- That's exactly how the Father uses prayer for our sake
 - The purpose in prayer is for us to engage in a meaningful conversation with our Creator
 - The point of that conversation is not to wear God down with our mindless repetition
 - God already has all knowledge and wisdom and perfection
 - By comparison, we know nothing, understand nothing and are imperfect in everything we do
 - Furthermore, Jesus says in v.8, that the Father already knows what you need before you ask
 - So obviously, the more time we spend in communication with God, the better things will be for us
 - So we shouldn't waste the opportunity by babbling like an infant
 - Incessant repetition does nothing to change God's mind...we just miss opportunity to learn from Him
- So knowing how not to pray, Jesus then gives us the right way to approach our conversation with God

Matt. 6:9 "Pray, then, in this way:

'Our Father who is in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.

Matt. 6:10 'Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.

Matt. 6:11 'Give us this day our daily bread.

Matt. 6:12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Matt. 6:13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

[For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.']

- Before we look at the content of Jesus prayer, let's acknowledge that this prayer has led to perhaps the greatest irony in all the Bible
 - An irony is a state of affairs that goes deliberately contrary to what one expects

- And the irony here, is that many Christians use this prayer in a way that is deliberately contrary to what Jesus expected
- Jesus just finished teaching the Church not to engage in repetitious prayer
- And yet, what prayer do Christians mindlessly repeat more than perhaps any other? The “Our Father” prayer
 - People commonly chant verses 9-13 in unison, even though Jesus said in v.7, don’t use repetition
 - You can’t make this stuff up
- So knowing that Jesus did *not* want us to recite this prayer mindlessly, why *did* He give it to us?
 - Because every good conversation requires sensible structure and logic
 - So our prayers aren’t to be repetitive, but they *are* supposed to be planned and thoughtfully constructed
- Notice in v.9, Jesus says pray in this *way*
 - He didn’t say pray this prayer...which means He wasn’t asking us to pray these words verbatim
 - Now, because this model is Scripture, we can certainly read it verbatim and even “pray” it as we might pray any Scripture, like Psalms
- But when we engage in personal prayer with the Father, we should not recite these words assuming they have magical properties
 - Praying these words verbatim actually displays a lack of understanding of the context of Jesus’ words, not an appreciation for them
 - Instead, we are to pray according to this *format*
- So let’s look at the structure of this prayer
 - Jesus’ example has six parts, and each part should be present in our prayers
 - We don’t necessarily have to cover all six parts in every moment of prayer

- But in general, our prayer life should touch upon these areas, at least periodically
- And the first part is the destination for our prayers, and Jesus says in v.9, that our prayers should be directed to the Father Who is in Heaven
 - The Person of God Who receives prayer is the Father – not Jesus, not the Holy Spirit, but the Father
 - Jesus and the Holy Spirit play roles in prayer, of course
 - Jesus is our High Priest, Who intercedes on our behalf with the Father, and by His blood, our petitions may come before a holy God
 - And the Holy Spirit is our Teacher, Who guides us in our prayer life, instructing us on when and how to pray
- But the audience for our prayers is always the Father
 - So if in the past, you've prayed to Jesus – or anyone or anything else – then you now understand that was incorrect
 - Direct your prayers to the Father only, and as you do, take note that Jesus says He is your Father in Heaven
 - By your faith in Jesus, the Bible says you have been adopted into the family of God, made a fellow heir with Christ and have peace with the Father
 - So as you pray, recognize you are speaking to a Heavenly Father Who cares for you, Who has adopted you and wants the best for you
- Secondly, Jesus says at the end of v.9, that we should declare, "hallowed be your name"
 - The word "hallowed" means "sanctified", set apart for holiness
 - So we're saying God alone is holy, set apart from the rest of Creation
 - Unique and unequalled in all time and space
 - Nothing can compare to the Creator
 - Jesus' point is that our prayer life should include time glorifying and praising the Father for Who He is and what He has done for you in Christ

- We have the opportunity to approach Him boldly, but we should never take that for granted
 - Devote some of your prayer time to simply acknowledging God for Who He is
 - Doing so will set your heart in the right place for the rest of your prayer
 - Think of it as a private time of worship
- Thirdly, Jesus says in v.10, we should be Kingdom-minded in our prayers
 - Jesus gives us the example of praying for the arrival of the Kingdom and the realization of God's will being done on earth one day
 - This is such great insight for your prayer life, and I hope you will embrace it
 - Jesus is saying we need to have eyes for eternity in our prayers
 - Yes, our lives on earth will give us ample material to pray about
 - But don't forget that this world and all its problems are passing away
 - And one day, Jesus will return and His Kingdom will be set up on earth
 - And when that happens, we will be in new, eternal bodies that will never die, serving Christ without sin or shame
 - That is the true life we are promised, and it's the one that will last for an eternity
 - Meanwhile, for a short time, we endure this miserable, sinful world and our brief life in it
 - Don't spend all your time praying about the fleeting things of this world
 - Make sure you spend some time in prayer about the eternal things to come
 - Pray for a good reward and the strength to earn it while it's available
 - Pray for a good position in Christ's Government, which depends on a good testimony

- Most of all, pray in excitement and expectation for the chance to see a world ruled in perfection and justice by our King Jesus
- Fourthly, Jesus says in v.11, to pray for your daily bread, which means to pray for your personal needs
 - Remember this is a model, not a prescription, so we aren't all necessarily going to pray for bread literally
 - Our daily needs vary, and so will our prayers
 - But Jesus' point is that prayer for daily needs is both expected and appropriate for the believer
 - So whether that's a financial need, a health need, a relationship need, or whatever, bring them before the Lord
 - But notice where this request falls in the priority of Jesus' example
 - It comes after praising God's goodness and sovereignty
 - And it comes after turning your attention to Kingdom matters, to things eternal
 - And that's a healthy way to approach your prayer life...putting those things above your personal needs
 - If your prayer life is dominated by personal concerns, then it probably means your eyes are directed downward too much
 - There will always be problems in your life of one kind or another, but we can't allow the needs of this life to obscure our hope for what's coming
 - We must reverse that perspective...living with eyes for eternity, knowing that in this world we will have tribulation, but we've overcome the world
- Fifthly, Jesus says make room in your prayer life for forgiveness, both for yourself and for others
 - Jesus is coming back to this particular issue after He finishes His model of prayer in vs. 14-15
 - So rather than spending much time on this particular topic now, I'm going to put it off until we cover it next week

- For now, it's enough to say that we should spend some time confessing our sins to the Lord and seeking His forgiveness
- Likewise, we should spend time resolving our resentment and anger toward others who have hurt us
 - Ask the Lord to help us come to resolution with others' offenses against us, so that we can truly let them go and find forgiveness for others
 - As we'll learn next time, these two things are closely linked, spiritually speaking
- Finally, Jesus says our prayers should include a request for protection from spiritual warfare
 - Satan is real and so are the demonic angels that followed him in rebellion against the Father
 - They are present in the world, operating continuously and aware of who their enemies are
 - As born-again believers in Jesus Christ, we are enemies of the enemy and his forces
 - And therefore, we are going to experience their attacks from time to time – even more so, as we become more effective witnesses for Jesus
 - We need prayer-cover to withstand their attacks
 - We need to pray that the Lord would protect us from falling for the schemes of the enemy
 - The wording of v.13 is unfortunate in the English translation
 - It makes it sound as if there is possibility the Father may lead us to be tempted by Satan, which is never true
 - But in the original Greek, Jesus simply meant, lead us away from the enemy's temptations
 - So we should pray that as the enemy schemes to tempt our flesh to do the wrong thing, that the Lord would rescue us from ourselves
- So in summary, we don't want to practice our prayer life in a hypocritical way, which is praying like those who don't have a relationship with God

- Instead, approach the Father boldly, taking full advantage of what He has made available to us through Christ, and engage Him in a meaningful conversation
 - In that conversation, structure your prayer to include the six major areas Jesus gave us in His example
 - Because Jesus says that what pleases the Father and that's where we have a great opportunity for reward
 - But don't recite the words Jesus gave
 - Fill in the details with your own words, your own needs, your own desires, from your own heart
 - And consider that your eternal rewards depend, to some degree, upon your prayer life – on whether you pray, whether you pray hypocritically, on what content you put before God, and the nature of your heart in prayer
- And as you do, anticipate God's response...because He will be speaking to you too