

Wednesdays in the Word
Digging Deeper
April 29, 2020
Mathew 6:5-8

On Prayer

Jesus had a way of taking large concepts and simplifying them. Here's a big one to consider. (John 5:39). The religious leaders of His time were not unlike many today who seem to take simple concepts and expand them to large and difficult rules and regulations. Their Talmud claims to have added hundreds of additional laws to God's laws. Jesus speaks here of hypocrites who did things for show, to be acknowledged by others. Whether leaders or pious individuals some folks desire to have the acclaim of others. Backing up to verse 1 our Lord cautions His followers to give to the needy but to keep it secret. He implies also that some seek not only the praise of others but that this praise is seen as a reward. We all want to be liked and respected by others but when that becomes our reason for doing good it puts things out of order. Our alms and good works are to bless God alone and our doing good for others ought to flow from pure love, never looking for anything in return. (1Peter 1:22). If we are to be rewarded it will come from God but what reward will we receive?

In our text for today, starting in verse 5, we can ask this question. Who are these hypocrites (actors or pretenders) praying to? Can we indeed pray to God in such a feigned way as to impress others with long or elegant language? Do we impress God in some way? (Matthew 15:7-9). Jesus said these prayers were a spectacle for men. He makes a scary statement in saying they have their reward. If all we wish to do is be seen of others then that will be the sole result of our efforts. Think through the celebrities of our time. So many seem to perform simply to be praised by an audience. They live for the esteem that is placed on them by their fans. Our culture of selfies and constant posting of photos and events has never been more shallow and self serving. The Greek word for reward is *misthos* which means payment for service. Whether we want others to pay us for our good deeds and many words or even expect God to do so we are completely in the wrong. Jesus said they HAVE their reward. If that is the case then no further reward will be paid. The praise of men is all they will ever receive. Imagine spending your life trying to have people praise you and think or speak highly of you. What a waste of effort. Do right because it's right, not because you may benefit from it. (Matthew 5:16, Phillipians 2:3-4, 21, James 3:16). Here again is the classic struggle between pride and humility.

In verse 6 Jesus instructs us to pray privately. This is not to say we should not pray publicly or corporately. Our group prayer meetings are the backbone of God's work. We must pray for and with others but in humility and fear. Remember these two men? (Luke 18:10-14). Here we see today's text perfectly illustrated. When we join others in community with God it is powerful and impressive. It must be taken seriously. In His teaching on private prayer Jesus uses the term *closet*. The Greek is *tameion*. This is a dispensary or chamber on the ground floor and interior of the house. It is one of the few rooms with a door to protect the contents from animals or spoil. Think of a storeroom or pantry. Interestingly we are told to close ourselves in a room that is dedicated to providing our needs. When we come before the Lord we seek Him to

provide our needs. Our prayer time can be literally in a private place like this or simply in a private state of heart and mind. We turn inward to the Holy Spirit residing within us. When we appeal to our Creator and Sustainer in such a way He alone will reward us. With what? Primarily with Himself! Our greatest need is our God and He fills us with His peace, glory and fellowship when we separate ourselves to Him. (Psalm 63:1). He promises to provide our needs and we can certainly trust Him to do so. But those things are secondary to the pure joy of the oneness of His fellowship. (Matthew 6:31-33). The open reward Jesus speaks of is truly the Day in which our salvation will be manifested when we meet together with one another in eternity with Him.

The heathen prayers spoken of in verse 7 were such that a long prayer to each of the many gods they believed in would hopefully be heard by whichever deity pertained to the need of the day. It was felt that the gods might not understand the prayers and by repetition and rephrasing the message would eventually be heard. Have you ever spoken to a person who spoke broken english and raised your voice to be understood? Many religions today including some christian sects will endlessly repeat a mantra or song or loudly chant as a sign of dedication and frankly because they run out of fresh thought. Try speaking to your spouse like that.

Speaking of a spouse, verse 8 contains an important idea. It has been conjectured that if God knows what we need before we even ask then why pray? I have been blessed with a wonderful old fashioned wife. She knows what I need and faithfully provides. Imagine though that I felt I had no need to communicate with her. I could say to myself, "Why talk to her? She knows my needs. She'll provide." A relationship like that would fail. Our communication confirms and reaffirms our love, respect, thankfulness and need for each other. God knows our needs but desires our companionship. (1 John 3:1, Psalm 103:17, Zephaniah 3:17). Talk to Him. Talk with Him. Listen to Him. Our marriages fully represent our relationship to the Lord and all our behaviour should model that. May the Lord bless us all as He trains and teaches us to grow in His Love.