

Matthew 6:5-8. Christ Forbids Ostentation in Prayer.

by Favell Lee Mortimer

Jesus teaches us to pray in secret, not for human approval, but for genuine communion with God, and to stir up desires to pray by considering the Scriptures and seeking God's guidance.

Scripture: Psalm 145:18, Matthew 6:5, Matthew 6:7, Luke 18:10, Romans 8:26, Ephesians 6:18, Philippians 4:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, James 5:16

Topics: "Private Prayer", "Sincere Faith"

Description

Favell Lee Mortimer delves into the teachings of Jesus regarding prayer, emphasizing the importance of sincerity and humility in our communication with God. Jesus warns against praying for show and encourages private, heartfelt prayers as a true reflection of faith and love for God. Mortimer highlights that prayer is not just about words but about the genuine desires of our hearts, quoting a Christian poet to describe prayer as the soul's sincere desire. She also addresses the struggle of feeling spiritually dead at times and provides guidance on how to stir up desires for prayer through reflection on Scripture and the eternal truths revealed in it.

Transcript

Our Savior continued to expose the emptiness of the works in which the Pharisees prided themselves. One of these was giving. This has been already considered. Another was prayer. Let us now direct our attention to this subject. The customs of Judea were very different from ours. The synagogues were always open, and people resorted to them, as well as to the temple, in order to pray. There was no harm in the custom, and many people no doubt went to the synagogues to pray in sincerity, as we know one poor tax-collector went to the temple, and sincerely said, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

But others went only to be seen of men. There were also certain hours of the day at which the Pharisees said certain prayers; and if at these hours they found themselves in the streets, they stopped to repeat their task; and for this purpose preferred the corner of a street to a more private place. Jesus bade his disciples avoid such ostentatious conduct, and advised them to retire to their closets to pray, and to conceal from the world their communion with their heavenly Father.

If we really love God, we shall pray to him in secret. It is clear, that if we pray in church and in the family, but neglect secret prayer, we are only seeking human approbation.

It is a great proof, both of faith and love, to be frequent in secret prayer. If we were told that a departed friend was hovering near us, though unseen, and that he could hear us, though he could not answer us aloud, should we feel inclined to speak to him? This would depend upon two circumstances--first, upon our faith in the statement, that is, upon our really believing that the friend was near; and secondly, upon our love for this friend--If we both believed he was near, and loved him, we would find great delight in talking to him. "He who comes to God, must believe that he is." If we doubt whether God hears us, no wonder we find prayer a burdensome task. If, also, we do not love God, how can we find it pleasant to speak to him? But if we believe that he is very near us, and if we love him with fond attachment, O how delightful to shut our closet door, and to pour out our hearts before him! And will he give us a reward for doing so? What! A reward to his needy creatures, for calling upon him for help! The reward will be, He will answer our petitions as He has promised, and at the last acknowledge us as His children.

Jesus also tells us in what manner we should pray. It is not words alone that move God. The heathen think they shall be heard for much speaking, and say, Baal, hear us, Baal, hear us. The Roman Catholics repeat the Lord's prayer many hundreds of times, and count the numbers upon their string of beads. But of what use are such prayers; for what are words without desires! We should use words, because in using them our desires grow stronger; but words without desires are but unmeaning noise. A Christian poet beautifully describes the nature of prayer in the following lines--

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,

Uttered, or unexpressed;

The hidden motion of a fire

That trembles in the bosom.

Prayer is the burden of a sigh,

The falling of a tear;

The upward glancing of an eye,

When none but God is near.

Sometimes the mouth cannot express what the heart feels. But sometimes the soul feels dead, and we cannot pray in spirit and in truth. An unconverted heart is always dead; but even the renewed heart has seasons of barrenness. How are desires to be stirred up? Take the Scriptures--consider the things revealed in them--Heaven, Hell, God, the Judge of all--the crucified Savior--a precious soul--a fleeting life. Is there nothing you desire to escape? Nothing you desire to possess? Have you nothing to say to Him who can do everything for you, and who has done so much already? What would many a lost soul give for such an opportunity as you now possess? God, who sees your efforts, will send his Holy Spirit to teach you how to pray. Let us remember that prayer is our safety; without prayer we must be lost. When a person can receive no nourishment, we give him up; we know he must die if he can take nothing. If we cannot pray, we must perish.

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