**Matthew 6B**

* Today, we reach a passage in Matthew’s Gospel that must be one of the best-known Scriptures in all the New Testament
  + - 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
  + 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
* Let’s start with the big picture…Jesus is teaching on the side of a mountain near 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

**Matthew 6:1**

*“Watch out! Don’t do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven.*

* Jesus is concerned 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 the lost
  + We must be careful not to do so in the hope of receiving the praises from others
  + Instead, we should practice righteousness to please the Lord alone
  + 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 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
  + 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 as we conduct ourselves in these four areas of spiritual life?
* Understanding the context, let’s look at Jesus’ second example on prayer

**Matthew 6:5-8**

**5***“When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get.*

**6***But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.*

**7***“When you pray, don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again.*

**8***Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even 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 you pray
    - His point is on the heart of the one praying
    - Are we praying merely to impress other people, or are we praying to

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

of words

* + - 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
    - 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
    - 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 someone who lacks a with God
  + 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 theand the message is the interaction from 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 (Hebrews 4:15)
    - 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 those “prayers”
  + Spiritually speaking, unbelievers are grasping in the dark, operating without wisdom or understanding, trying to find a God they don’t know
    - 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 their 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 , what they lack in

* + - 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
* Scriptures say that by the blood of Christ, we may approach God 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
* Jesus tells us not to pray in this way, because it’s hypocritical
  + When we turn off our brain and revert to mindless repetition, we’re merely pretending to communicate with God, without actually doing it
  + 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
* Prayer is supposed to be a conversation with God, and mantra isn’t the same as conversation
  + 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
    - 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
* Knowing how not to pray, Jesus then gives us the right way to approach our conversation with God

**Matthew 6:9-13**

**9***Pray like this:*

*Our Father in heaven,  
    may your name be kept holy.***10***May your Kingdom come soon.  
May your will be done on earth,  
    as it is in heaven.***11***Give us today the food we need,***12***and forgive us our sins,  
    as we have forgiven those who sin against us.***13***And don’t let us yield to temptation,   
    but rescue us from the evil one.*

* 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 and logic
    - 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
    - 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
* 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 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
    - Jesus is our High Priest, who intercedes on our behalf with the Father
    - 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
    - Direct your prayers to the Father only, and as you do, take note that Jesus says He is your Father in Heaven
    - By 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
    - 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, “may your name be kept holy”
  + The word “holy” means “sanctified”, set apart
    - 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 us 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 -minded in our prayers
  + Jesus gives us the example of praying for the arrival of the Kingdom and the realization of God’s 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
  + Don’t forget that this world and all its problems are passing away
    - One day, Jesus will return and His Kingdom will be set up on earth
    - 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 eternity
* Fourthly, Jesus says in v.11, to pray for your daily food, which means to pray for your personal
  + Remember this is a model, not a prescription, so we aren’t all necessarily going to pray for food 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
    - Whether that’s a financial need, a health need, a relationship need, or whatever, bring them before the Lord
  + 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 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 , 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
    - We’ll cover this next week
    - We should spend some time confessing our sins to the Lord and seeking His forgiveness
  + 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 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 Satan and his forces
  + This means that we are going to experience attacks from time to time − even more as we become more effective witnesses for Jesus
    - We need prayer-cover to withstand these attacks
    - We need to pray that the Lord would protect us from falling for the enemy’s deceptions
  + Ask the Father to help in the areas where you are the
    - Those areas where you are easily tempted
    - Ask the Father to give you the strength to resist
* 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

**Hebrews 12:12-14**

**12***Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.*

**13***“Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.*