

Worthless Prayer Meetings (Full Sermon) –
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Berean Baptist Church Livon MI

By Paul Washer

Bible Text: Matthew 6:5-13

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Grace Community Church

1624 E. Commerce Street

San Antonio, TX 78205

Website: www.gccsatx.com

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/gcc

You may be seated. I kind of feel in a way like John Wesley who was riding along on his horse and he noticed that for several days he had not been persecuted or nothing evil had been spoken about him and so he got off his horse and began to search his heart and pray on his knees saying, “Father, have I compromised that so many people are in favor of me?”

And right then while he was praying a farmer who truly hated every part of John Wesley saw him praying, picked up a brick and threw it and it missed John Wesley just by an inch. It just glanced off of his nose as you could say and John Wesley looked up and said, “Thank you, Father, for your once again confirmation of my ministry.”

So we are often confirmed in this day and age not by applause, but by the scowls and the misinterpretations and such that we have to deal with. But I do appreciate your encouragement, I really do.

We are going to continue talking about prayer a bit and in Matthew chapter six we have in verse nine:

Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. ‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 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.]]’¹

Now the first thing I want us to do is kind of look around this text for a moment.

It says in verse three, “But when you give to the poor...”²

He says in verse five, “When you pray...”³

¹ Matthew 6:9-13.

² Mathew 6:3.

And he says in verse 16, “Whenever you fast...”⁴

These were three works of piety in ancient Judaism: to give to the poor, to pray and to fast. And notice Jesus does not say if you give to the poor or if you pray or if you fast. But he says when, that it would be a common practice among his people to give, to pray and, yes, to even fast.

Now I am going to talk about prayer tonight, but I have this little window of an opportunity. Let me just share with you something about fasting because it is so misunderstood. Fasting is not an attempt to manipulate God. Fasting is all about passion. You can do fasting legalistically and it is death. But it is about passion.

What do I mean? Let me give you an illustration again. Let’s say that my family and I we planned a vacation somewhere. For four years that is all we have thought about and planned. And we are headed out the door that day for that vacation, that fulfillment of four years of dreaming and all of the sudden our child falls to the ground and is unconscious.

Now at that moment there will be none of us who stomps their foot and says, “Man, we are going to miss the vacation.”

All of the sudden, in one second, that vacation doesn’t even come into our mind.

I love to eat, but eating doesn’t come into my mind. As a matter of fact, if at that moment someone pulled up in the driveway and said, “Paul, I have got two gift certificates to the best restaurant in Detroit. Do you want to go eat?” I would say, “What are you, a barbarian? What is wrong with you? My child... Eat?”

That is what fasting is about. It is when you are so passionate about something, about God, the advancement of his kingdom, the need of a believer, of an unreached people group, you are so passionate about the right things and maybe so distraught because you desire so much more for the advancement of the kingdom, that passion takes over the stomach. I don’t want to eat. I can’t eat until this thing is settled, until God grants me peace, until God gives me that nod and lets me know that my prayers have been heard.

If I had four minutes to teach somebody on fasting that would be it.

Now he says also in verse six something very important. He says... well, let’s go to five because we can learn a lesson there.

“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.”⁵

³ Matthew 6:5.

⁴ Matthew 6:16.

Now this is not against public praying. It is against praying for all the wrong reasons. But, here is the dangerous thing I want to show you about this text. It is one of the most dangerous, frightening things in the entire Bible. He says this in verse five, “Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.”⁶

The most terrifying thought that could ever run into someone’s mind if they are a clear thinker is God will give you the desires of your heart.

You say, “What is terrifying about that?”

Well, let me pull something from the [?] voyage of the [?] in C S Lewis in the *Chronicles of Narnia*. They go into this very, very black place in the sea and they come across this man wailing and full of terror and they ask him what is wrong and he says, “Flee from this place.”

Why? What is so dangerous here?

And the man is floating in this dark, pitch black sea, his face white with fear. He says, “Flee from this place.”

And they say, “Why?”

He said, “This is the place where all your dreams come true.”

And all the sailors were like, “Yeah, why run?”

And he must notice that in their face because he goes, “You fools. This is a place where all your dreams come true.” That means not just the good ones, the terrifying ones.

And you think, well, you mean it is a bad thing for God to give me the desires of your heart? Well, he gave the Pharisees the desires of their heart and then they went to hell. Their greatest desire was to be seen by men. God gave them their reward in full. They were seen by men, honored by men and then they went to hell.

So when you talk about fasting and you talk about praying it is all about passion. It is all about passion, a right passion.

And let me say this. Passion is not the sin of the Church, a lack of passion is the sin of the Church.

Now, I said all that to say all this. This is so hard to explain in the time that I have, but I will give it a whirl.

⁵ Matthew 6:5.

⁶ Ibid.

Most prayer meetings are absolutely worthless. So that I am really clear, most prayer meetings are absolutely worthless, first of all because they are like town meetings. You spend 20 minutes telling people news. So and so is getting their gall bladder out. So and so is going to give birth. So and so has this problem. It is almost like a town gossip session, everyone talking about... and it is 20 minutes of a town meeting in which you are sharing all these little trinkets and then will someone now lead us in prayer?

In our church the elders asked me. They said, "Could you help us work with the prayer?"

I said, "Sure. This is going to be radical. So all right. All right here we are going to go."

The first prayer meeting no one is to share a need in this prayer meeting. No one is to share a need to another person in this prayer meeting. You pray your need. And if someone hears you praying that need and is burdened to pray that need, they will. But we will not have 20 minutes of a town meeting of sharing back and forth about what is going on all over the community and then praying for two minutes. You pray your needs.

Secondly, don't even think...

You say, "Man, he is getting riled."

Yeah, you are right, because I am tired of useless prayer meetings and I am leaving tomorrow.

Don't even... let me use some... don't even think about the hypocritical religious thing that goes on in churches today in which you stand up and you share with people a need that you have never even prayed about. How many times have you done that? You share a need and you haven't even prayed about it. You are not burdened about it. You are just wanting to spread the news.

Is anything I am saying familiar to you? I always tell people, "Don't share a prayer need unless you, yourself, have been burdened about that need and you have been praying for it consistently, because all you are doing is gossiping."

So let's just look at some practical things about prayer. Number one, prayer is not to be—when we gather together it is not to be a town meeting where it takes 25 minutes to share all the things going on and then two minutes of praying. And when you get around in a group of five or six believers and you start to pray don't spend 25 minutes sharing about your needs. Pray them. If you have a need or you want to... something that is going on in somebody's life and you think it needs to be prayed about, then just get down there right there in that group and pray about it and if God lays it on someone else's heart who hears you praying, maybe they will continue the same prayer, maybe not.

We spend so much time doing everything but praying in prayer meetings.

Now, third thing. We spend almost all our time praying to keep saints out of heaven instead of praying to get sinners into heaven.

Auntie Em's bad knee is not a big issue compared to millions of people dying and going to hell.

Now, I struck a nerve there. Well, if your knee was bad, you would want people praying for you.

Yeah, but if my children were going to hell, I would much rather they be praying for my children than my knee. And yes there is a place to pray for one another and to pray for illnesses and sicknesses, but I tell you what. I go into churches sometimes because I visit a lot of churches and I will attend their prayer meetings and it sounds like a medical convention. It is unbelievable.

I was going to speak at a series of meetings and they said, "Brother Paul, we want you to come. We, you know, we just so want revival."

And I said, "Well, I don't carry that thing around in my back pocket."

They said, "We just want revival."

I said, "Well, that is fine. You know."

And so we go in there and meeting with all the elders before the church starts in the morning, Sunday and I was excited.

Someone said, "Anybody got anything to pray about?"

And I mean it took off the next 15 minutes there was no prayer. It was just... it was like a group of doctors had come together and were discussing all the ailments of every person in the church.

Now, again, we ought to pray for the sick, but when that is all we do and we really don't pray, we talk about them, we announce it to the congregation. We don't lay on the floor. We don't cry out to God. We don't fast. We just... it is a town meeting. That is not prayer. That is not prayer.

Now, fourthly, people sometimes will ask me, "Brother Paul, how do you pray? I mean, how do you pray?"

I love what one old preacher said one time. It was very convicting. They asked him.

They said, this church said, "We are going to have a conference on prayer. Is there anyone you can recommend?"

And he goes, “Well, there are a lot of people I know who teach on prayer, but they don’t pray and a lot of people who pray who don’t teach on it. So, no. There is no one I can recommend for your prayer conference.”

Prayer is not a mystery. It is just we need to listen to the voice of our master.

Look at this.

The disciples came to Jesus in Luke and they said, “Teach us to pray.”⁷

And Jesus gave them this prayer that I am using here in Matthew. And it is this. Ok, you want to learn how to pray?

Verse nine.

Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.’⁸

Now, what follows that?

“Give us this day our daily bread.”⁹

Meet our needs. Now I want you to look at something. And if you could just catch this you will see what prayer meetings are and what they are not.

“Our Father who art in heaven.”¹⁰

First of all, perfect psychology of prayer. He holds a perfect tension here. Jesus knows how to approach the Father. He is our Father. Therefore, we can approach him with joy and gladness because of the blood of the Lamb that has been shed for our sins. We stand before him perfectly righteous. We can go into the presence of the Father without fear. We can rush in where angels fear to tread. That is true. While angels are bowing down and cannot look at his glory, we are like little children running around the folds of his robe. He is our Father. And that is one aspect of his person that you need to keep in mind.

The other aspect is this. Your Father just happens to be in heaven and he just happens to be the Lord of glory.

So we have this perfect aspect of he loves me. I am accepted in the beloved. And this other thing, my Father is King of glory, King of kings and Lord of lords.

⁷ Luke 11:1.

⁸ Matthew 6:9-10.

⁹ Matthew 6:11.

¹⁰ Matthew 6:9.

I am amazed as I get older and older how little respect I receive from the youth. It is unbelievable. We are losing any understanding. Youth have almost no understanding of how they are to speak to an elder or even approach one.

And you say, “Well, what is the big problem?”

It affects our view of God because we also don’t understand how we are to come before the presence of God.

There is a sense in which in coming out of this elder person ought to be love. It ought to be a joyful acceptance of a visitation from a younger person. But at the same time recognize the respect that is necessary.

I had a group of young guys a while back. They were making fun of an old man. They were in the car. An old man was driving. He was probably in his 80s and he was driving really slow. And they were saying some things and I kind of stopped them.

I said, “Look, that old man you are making fun of probably drove a tank straight into Nazi Germany.”

The point is what? We have lost the idea of knowing that we will be accepted at one point and can joyfully enter in, yet at the same time there is an idea of reverence and godly fear, godly fear.

So when we approach God we approach him as children, but children knowing that their father is the Lord of glory.

Now, we go on. And I want you to look at something and I want you to compare you prayer meetings with what I am going to say.

He says:

Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.’¹¹

The priority of all the praying that Jesus gives us here does the great majority of his words deals with one thing, a passion for God to be glorified throughout the world. The passion that Christ had above even his passion for saving men was to do the will of his Father for the glory of his Father.

Christ came principally not for men, but for his Father, for the love he had for his Father, for his desire for his Father to be glorified and for the advancement of his Father’s

¹¹ Matthew 6:9-10.

kingdom. Christ was about one thing as a priority and it was the glory of God, that God would be known and therefore worshipped by all creation.

And so he is saying, “Hallowed by Your name.”¹²

The word literally means... we can put it in modern vernacular, that your name be unique. And that is, above all things, the meaning of holiness. People think holiness means sinlessness. No, holiness does not mean sinlessness. Righteousness is dealing with sinlessness. Holiness deals with uniqueness. He is cut. He is separated. He is someone totally and completely distinct. There is none like God.

That is why he is holy in love, because his love is not like any other love. That is why he is holy in righteousness. His righteousness is not like the righteousness of a man. That is why he is holy in power for no one is powerful like the Lord. Holiness means that God is not like anyone else.

That is why when Moses says, “God, who are you?” And God says, “I am who I am...”

I mean, if a Martian were to come down in Detroit—and I understand there are already a lot of them here—if a Martian were to come down into Detroit and look at me and say, “Who are you?” I would say, “Well, I am like him and I am like him and I am like her.” I can point outside of myself and give that Martian so many examples of who I am.

But when Moses says, “God, who are you?” he says, “I am who I am because there is no one else to point to.”

That is, of course, until 2000 years ago when someone said, “God, who are you?” and he pointed down to Jesus of Nazareth and said, “I am like him.”

So holiness to say, “Hallowed by thy name,”¹³ means that your name be unique above every other name and esteemed above every other name.

So when your church comes here on Wednesday night and you begin to pray, think about Jesus commanded you to pray this principally and to spend most of your prayer time crying out, “God, that your name, that your name be esteemed and worshipped in this body above everything else. That is our passion. And that your name be esteemed and worshipped above everything else and every other place in this world starting here going to Detroit, on and on and on and on and on.”

Do you do that when you pray? No, you are going through a hospital list.

And we say, “Why isn’t God moving?”

I will tell you why, because our passion is not the passion of Christ.

¹² Matthew 6:10.

¹³ Ibid.

“Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.”¹⁴

The advancement of the kingdom of Christ, as we go into Daniel and we see all of the other kingdoms of the world crushed underneath the kingdom of this one Messiah, the Christ. Our great passion should be that the kingdom of Jesus Christ advance. And how should it advance? Not through warfare, not through the physical power of a man, not through army, not through politics, but through truth and love and intercessory prayer and service and even dying for our enemies.

Now, every time... most missions conferences are very humanistic, very humanistic and I will tell you why. The motivation for missions, people are lost and going to hell. That is humanism. It is humanism. We are going out there to save a bunch of people from the justice of God. It is all about men. It is all about men.

Why do we do missions? Men are dying without Christ. Why do we do missions? People are suffering without Christ. That is what I hear over and over and over again. And that is an important thing. But, my friends, that is not the thing and if it is your the thing you have got the wrong thing.

I ask missionaries this when sometimes I am training missionaries. I will say, “Have you ever spent a sleepless night because of the lostness of a people group or a nation or the world in general?”

And they say, “Well, yes, I have.”

So, ok, that’s great. Now let me ask you a question. Have you ever spent a night without sleep because there were places on this earth where God and his Christ were not worshipped and served and glorified as they ought to be glorified.

And most of them say, “Never even thought about that.”

Humanism.

Missions is not all about men. It is all about God. It is a passion. Look at Jesus. You want to know how to pray?

Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done.’¹⁵

And let me tell you something about missions. Missions is very romantic, just a wonderful thing until you actually get to the mission field. Then it starts getting tough. When you go out there and you have got your tracts and your Bibles, maybe a little

¹⁴ Matthew 6:9-10.

¹⁵ Ibid.

portable pulpit, megaphone, you go out there in the middle of the plaza and preach the gospel, kind of got this idea, I will preach the gospel, people are going to get saved.

You get out there and preach the gospel and they take your tracts and your Bible and your megaphone and they grab you by the seat of the pants and they throw you out in that street. It is going to take a whole lot more than a romantic, emotional love for lost men to get you to pick those Bibles back up, dust yourself off, walk back in that plaza and preach again. It is going to take a passion for the glory of God.

Our prayer meetings should be people down here in their seats, wherever, crying out, "Oh, God, you are worthy of all honor and praise and yet in my own life I do not see it. Oh, God, strengthen me for your own good. In my own family you ought to be esteemed above all things. But my own family, their eyes are turned to so many things and we are given to so many things that are temporal and useless. Oh, God, that we might live for your glory. And then you look around, Lord, Detroit is more excited about a stupid World Series than they are the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Lord, turn us."

And then you look to the field and you find places where people worship stones and rocks and sticks.

You say, "Yes, those tribal people."

No. I am talking about New Yorkers and Detroiters. Steel and wheels and tires and green pieces of paper and diamonds and jewels and youth, everything that does not last. You see that and you get down on your knees, cry out. "God, you are not receiving the worship that is due you. Rise up for your own great name and do a work."

How much of praying and missions and everything else is just about men?

You know, it is amazing. When I preach this way someone says, "Well, what about men?"

But when I preach an entire sermon on the need of men, no one ever comes up to me and says, "Well, what about God?"

And being a very conservative, as conservative as you can get, evangelical Baptist, I want to tell you that my brethren have totally missed it, because the conservatives and the fundamentalists are just as bad. It is just a different form of humanism. It is all about men.

No, my friend, it is all about God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. The second commandment and the one that follows is and love your neighbor as yourself. We go to the mission field for our neighbor, yes, for men, yes, but never get the order out of place. Primarily we go for the glory of God.

Now just look quickly. I have only got about three minutes left, verse 33.

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”¹⁶

What are all these things? Verse 11.

“Give us this day our daily bread.”¹⁷

I want to submit to you. John Piper says this and it is so right on. He says, “Prayer is nothing more than a war time walkie talkie.”

Many people wonder why my prayers never get answered. There’s a lot of people at night I can say, “Show me or just share with me the last time God specifically answered a prayer.”

Because look what we are doing. It is the praying for this and praying for that and my needs and my problems and things I need and things that hurt me and on, so on and so forth.

But the only way this whole thing works is when the order is put in its exact biblical position. And what is that? First, you are seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness. And then all these things you need in your mind you are asking for things only the things you need so that you can be a part of his kingdom advancing. That is how it works.

Let me share with you about prosperity, healing, health and everything really succinctly how it works. It is like this. Everything in the Christian’s life is within the kingdom. And so you are basically saying this.

“Lord, if through prosperity you can advance the kingdom of God in my life and make me an instrument for the advancement of the kingdom of God, then give me prosperity. Lord, if through poverty and economic struggle you can greater advance the kingdom of God in my life and make me an instrument for that advancement in the world, then grant me poverty. Father, if by healing me of the pains in my body you can greater advance the kingdom of God, then heal me. But if through the pains in my body I am a more useful instrument to the kingdom of God, then leave me as I am.”

So then, all praying only makes sense, all praying is only biblical when it is found in this sphere, a group of people who are passionate about one primary thing, that God be glorified, his name be esteemed and worshipped above everything and everyone else on this planet. That is the only person who can pray and pray biblically, because it is from there that you begin to say, “Lord, meet my needs so that I might serve thee. That is all.”

Do you see how turned around even prayer meetings can become something that does not bring God’s blessing, but actually his discipline.

¹⁶ Matthew 6:33.

¹⁷ Matthew 6:11.

I have much to say to you on these things, but we are out of time. But I want you to know. Please pray, pray. But just take him at his word.

“Pray then in this way...”¹⁸

And do you know what? If I were to continue on anymore than right now it would lose its impact. I have left you with enough to stir you up and your elders can take you the rest of the way.

I haven't spoken to your pastors. But I don't cant' tell you. When I shared this how many pastors walk up to me and go, “Thank you, because that is the way prayer meetings are.”

I don't know how they are here. They might be completely different. Praise God if they are. But in every one of our lives praying only becomes sensible, it only becomes biblical when the focus of it is, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.”¹⁹

God bless you.

Pastor.

¹⁸ Matthew 6:9.

¹⁹ Matthew 6:33.