

Sermon on the Mount: God Mastered

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of cultivating righteousness through a relationship with God, and the need for privacy and intimacy with God in prayer.

Duration: 47:27

Topics: "Sermon on the Mount"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by expressing condolences for a deceased individual and commending his widow and children. The sermon then transitions to discussing the topic of prayer, specifically focusing on the need to avoid hypocrisy. Jesus is said to emphasize the importance of privacy in prayer, cautioning against praying in public to be seen by others. The speaker also highlights the influence of God on believers, urging them to act differently and strive for perfection, just as their heavenly father does.

Transcript

Before coming to the text and to the message before us this morning, I think there are two things I would like to say very briefly. One is to say what a joy it is to find a number of you able to be out after the summer months, after the winter months. I hope that summer is still to come.

Some of you have been laid aside, but the most precious thing is that some of you good people are our most faithful prayer warriors, and it's a joy to see you out among us. We owe so much to people who are not with us here on the Lord's Day. They can't be, either due to age or one reason or another.

They're shut aside and they're unable to come, but when the sun shines and someone with a car comes along, well, they're able to join us. Some of that category are here this morning. Please accept our thanks for all you are to us and will continue to be.

The other thing I would like you to pray for a little family this morning that doesn't belong to Knox at all. I've had a great friend over the last, I would say, eight years. He was a medical man, an internist, who became a psychiatrist.

Sometimes you saw him sitting in one of these front seats. He really belonged to Little Trinity. He knew the Lord very, very intimately.

He was a codigger, as they say in England. He used to stay alongside John Stott when he was studying medicine in London. They were both under the same roof.

He was a delightful man. I came to know him because he taught me, tried to teach me, how to deal with various psychological problems. And we met every now and again and discussed some of the deeper, moral, psychological issues of the day.

We didn't talk much about it. And when I met people who had real problems that I felt they needed a physician, I generally sent them to him. And very suddenly his life has been cut short.

I'm not free to give you all the details this morning. There's no need to do that. But I do want to commend to you his widow and two children who are very much in the wilderness.

May the Lord in his grace comfort them today. And oh, that the Lord would raise up men like our brother who really loved people. I believe that he is dead physically today because he has tried to bear the burdens of so many until it became a crush upon his soul.

And I salute him as a brother in Christ, as a great medical man, and as a psychiatrist of the first order. He will have a great welcome in the presence of the great physician. Well now the message that is laid upon my heart this morning and the one to which we come in in our studies of the Sermon on the is based on the passage that was read verses 5 to 18 in Matthew chapter 6. We've entitled it God mastered.

I think a proper understanding of chapter 6 requires us to go back necessarily to the end of chapter 5. You will remember that even in verse 20 of chapter 5 our Lord said that he expected of his disciples a quality of righteousness that was greater than that of the Scribes and the Pharisees. Now their quality of righteousness was phenomenal in the eyes of their fellow men. Nevertheless our Lord Jesus made it quite clear that in his kingdom his subjects, children of God, subjects of the kingdom of the heavens, must by his grace be able to produce a quality of righteousness that supersedes that.

In what sense can our righteousness, whether in the realm of morals or religion, in what sense can our righteousness supersede that of the Scribes and the Pharisees. Now I believe that Jesus gives us the key to that in the end of chapter 5 by telling us that our righteousness is to be dominated by God, superimposed by the image of God. It came out you remember with reference to loving our enemies.

He told his subjects, subjects of the kingdom that you must love your enemies even as you love yourself. And he goes on to explain why because he said your father he causes his rain to fall upon the just and the unjust alike. And he causes the sun to shine upon upon just and unjust alike.

And you he says you are to be like your father. Now you see the principle. You are to act like that because of the influence of God upon you.

And the secret of your greater, larger, deeper, more intricate and intimate righteousness really lies there in the influence of God upon you my people. You are called into an experience of God and along with God in which his image is to be deeply embossed upon your hearts and your spirits and your minds. And so you're to act differently.

And then chapter, chapter 5 comes to the end with the stress you be perfect like who? Well here's the answer. It brings us to the same point. You are to be perfect like your heavenly father who is in heaven.

In other words your lives, your lives are to bear his image. The righteousness that is to be brought about in your life is a righteousness that God brings into being. Or if you want me to put it in a slightly different way, it is a righteousness that is to be cultivated in the presence of God, by the power of God, according to the

word of God and for the glory of God.

It begins, continues and ends in and with God. It's a challenging subject this. Now last week we were thinking of this in terms of giving to the poor.

It was a necessary aspect of Jewish religion that they should give to the poor. King James speaks of it as almsgiving. Well if that's a good word, all right.

If it isn't, let's pass over it. Giving to the poor was a necessity of something that the Christian ought to be giving now every now and again, or doing every now and again. It is an integral part.

A believer, a man of God, ought always to be a man who is giving, because he's walking through life with God. And God is the senior partner in that partnership. And because God dominates the partnership, and his creatures are needy, and his children are needy, there must be a giving.

But now today we come to the subject of prayer. This principle is also to operate very especially in the area of prayer. Now look first of all at the hypocrisy that is to be avoided.

Verse 5. When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets to be seen of men. I tell you, I tell you the truth. They have received their reward in full.

Oh yes, they get their reward. People look at them and say, my aren't there a great lot of people. And that's the end of it, says Jesus.

They've received their reward, and they've received it in full. There's nothing more to come. But you're not to be like them.

Bearing in mind, as we said last time, that the word hypocrisy hails from a source which implies first of all acting, and then playing a part, as in a theater, and thus superimposing someone else's mode of behavior upon oneself. Jesus says to his followers, now you must be as far from that kind of living as is possible. You must be yourselves.

And being yourselves, you must learn out of your new selves to produce righteousness that is acceptable to God. Not something that you put on as on a theater stage, because you're putting on a show. And you must not pray just because you're in the place where people are praying, or because people expect you to pray.

You must learn to pray because of the person you are, because of your relationship to God and his relationship to you. Jesus pleads here, you see, for genuine reality in prayer. The reality that springs out of a genuine knowledge of God.

Now there are a myriad reasons why people act the way they do in every area of life. One major cause found all too often in human experience is that we speak or are silent, we act or we remain inactive, because of the influence of other people upon us. We love to be highly praised by our fellows.

There is an old carnal nature in every one of us. And we itch for the commendation of men and women. So, if we think that the people that are looking on want us to say such and such a thing, the tendency is that we will do so.

Or if we think that it'll displease the people that are looking on and hearing us, it'll displease them if we say that, even though it is the truth, even though it may be the Word of God, we would rather have the praises of men, if you please. And so you see, there are many people who go through life, and this is the main factor that determines what they do or what they don't do, the praises of men. What will people think of me? Now that's hypocrisy.

That's being theatrical in moral things. That's living on the stage. That's not real living, that's making a mockery of life.

And it is as much so in prayer as in anything else. We are all familiar with the age-long adage and principle that it is not wise to emulate evil doers and evil speakers, and that's right, of course. You know, Jesus is saying something which is more challenging.

You should not allow your Christian life to develop to simply emulating good people in their goodness. Your righteous life should be righteous because of your relationship to God. You hear His Word.

You are indwelt by His Spirit. You love Him in measure. He is your God.

You call Him my God. He's your Father. You call Him my Father, our Father, who art in heaven.

Very well then. What our God is saying is this, even where it is appropriate to do good along with other people, it's far easier when other people agree with you, but you Christians should never do the good simply because people expect it, or simply because people will respect you for it. The source of it, as far as you are concerned, should be far deeper.

It should be in God. Now this is very, very challenging. Jesus insists that righteousness in terms of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting must not be a matter of course or of convenience or of mere conceding to custom, good customs though these may represent.

It must be a matter of living out the life we live in our hearts in relation to God. Now that's the first thing to notice here. There is a hypocrisy that we must shun.

Do you pray in the prayer meeting? Just because it's the done thing? Or because somebody else prays? Or do you have that little quiet place in your home just because somebody suggested it was a good thing? Now thanks be to God that there have been some who suggest such things. I'm not condemning that. But as Christian people you see, we should be wanting to do the right things, to pray and to have our own place of prayer in our own home, because God is real to us.

And the God who is real to us is our Father. And as our Father, he controls us. He masters us.

He directs us. And we are his children. Now the second thing I want you to notice in Jesus' teaching here is this.

We have here some practical instruction as to how to achieve such righteousness. Two or three things I mentioned. I shall be brief about them, but they're very important.

First of all, I believe Jesus is stressing the need for privacy. He described the hypocrite's method in verse 5. When you pray, he says, do not be like the hypocrites. Well, what do they do? This says Jesus.

They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they receive their reward in full. Now don't you be like them, he says.

They love to pray standing in the synagogue where everybody was seeing them, all eyes were fixed on them, and even on the corners of the streets from time to time. Now, we, on the contrary, subjects of the kingdom of our Lord, children of God, we are to seek a solitary place. We are to get away from the public eye and catch the eye and ear of God.

Now, my brother Christian, sister and brother, frankly before God this morning, is this a principle that is operating in your life? Now, you're not answerable to me, but I believe that God wants us to face this question this morning. Is there in your life an area, which you call the area of prayer, of devotion, private devotion, or whatever, where really you switch off the thought as everybody else is concerned, and the one thing that matters is that you are on the right wavelength with God. You're in touch, you're in tune with him.

Jesus says you need to get a part into your own room. There we must metaphorically, if not literally, close ourselves in. And in closing ourselves in with him, we close out everybody else for the time being.

And within that sacred arena, where no human eye is upon us, and no one is expected to disturb us, we must learn to discern the presence of God and commune with him, and plan our lives together with him. That's the first thing Jesus says. You need privacy.

We cannot pray amidst the bustle of life, unless we have first learned to pray apart and alone with God. Have you, my friend, have you, and allow me to ask it again this morning, have you a private place to which you thus retreat, and where you can remain undisturbed as you seek the face of God? It is indispensable for the quality of life that Jesus is requiring of us here. This kind of righteousness will not come.

You will never be able to overcome your temptations. You will never be able to overcome the opposition of the world, and the flesh, and the devil, unless you have a place apart, where you draw your resources from God to face ungodly men. Many of us flounder in public because we fail in secret, and of all secret places, in the secret place of prayer.

I have yet to meet a man or a woman who has a regular place for prayer, and Bible study, and communion with God, and who is a failure in the arena of daily life. Morally, I mean. Indeed, it's more subtle than that.

The moment you and I attempt to pray more in public than we do in private, that very moment we are on the slippery path that leads to hypocrisy. And this, of course, is a very challenging thing for a minister of the Word, and I acknowledge it humbly before you. There is nothing which is more devastating than this.

At some times, for one reason or another, and no reason is adequate, one spends more time in leading a congregation in prayer from the pulpit here, from the front here, than one has spent that morning, or that hour before the service, before the face of God. And it is a sin. It's a slur on the Almighty.

You and I must always have more in private than in public. William Hendrickson says that among the Jews, though prayers were always appropriate, there were set times of prayer, and we know for well that there were. The pious were expected to attend to their devotions, and there was morning, afternoon, and evening prayers.

And that's why you see this reference here to praying on the corners of the streets. If it was prayer time, the scribes and the Pharisees would stop. If they couldn't get to the appointed place, they would pray, they would say their prayers publicly, and people would hear.

According to Josephus, he adds, sacrifices, including prayers, were offered in the temple twice a day, and someone else adds a third. So you have these prayers and these sacrifices going on three times a day. And it became for all too many people a matter of rote, a matter of just going through the rigmarole.

And you see, brothers and sisters, coming to church can be like that. Even your altar in your home can become that. And your giving to the Lord's cause can be just that.

Anything, anything within the orbit of our spiritual life can become something mechanical. And that, says our Lord Jesus, is not as it ought to be. Our righteousness ought to grow out of our relationship with our all-righteous Father in heaven.

Out of our fellowship with Him, in which He is God, and we are His creatures. He is Father, we are His children. He is in command, we are His obedient.

Harvey G. Tusker says that the Greek word for room, go into your room, in verse 5, was actually used in our Lord's day for the storeroom where treasures might be kept. I don't know whether that is true or not. Tusker suggests it.

He doesn't make it very, very, doesn't make a dogmatic statement. But if it were true, how suggestive it is. Go to your room, says Jesus.

What room? The room where the treasures are kept. And brothers and sisters, that's what the prayer room really is. This is where God opens the caskets of His treasures upon men.

This is where men receive of the benefits of grace and of glory. This is where they find mercy and grace to help in time of need. This is where strength is given to the weak.

This is where wisdom is given to those who are incapable of facing a day's task. This is where courage comes from. This is where it all comes from.

Go into your room, says Jesus, and lock your door or close your door. Fasten your door behind you. And there in the treasure house of God, you will find that He has somewhere to give you.

Now having said all this, however, let's be quite clear in our own minds that Jesus' main point in stressing the need for secret prayer is not so much for the sake of the secrecy in and of itself, but rather with a view to keeping our motives pure. We need privacy so as not to attempt to play up to men that are listening to us. We need privacy to be alone with God and not to allow our thoughts, our minds, our hearts to be diverted at all, but rather to deal realistically with our heavenly Father.

Ostensibly, some people might be able to do that with a crowd of folk around them. I never could. I have to close my eyes if I want to pray in a bus or in a subway or wherever.

Some of you may be able to. Just draw apart and be like an island amidst a whole multitude of people. God bless you.

And most of us are otherwise. We have to disengage from the world in order to engage our souls with God. Praying in private saves us from fashioning our prayers in order to tickle the itching ears of men and play the hypocrite.

Too often it has been said the secret to failure in our lives is our failure in secret. Let's take note of that. It came from our A. Finlayson of the Free Church College in Edinburgh.

So that's the first thing we need is privacy. Then we need intimacy with God. I think that's the real significance of verse six.

When you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. Now will you notice you've got into the room, you've got privacy, but privacy itself is not enough.

You've got to make contact. Merely going into a room and locking the doors and saying well now here I'm going to speak to God, that doesn't bring me any nearer the Lord. Unless in my heart of hearts and by the Holy Spirit's working and by the Word of God I can draw near as the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews puts it.

And so you see this applies only to men and women of faith. Now you've got to be a believer here. If you're only a church member and you've never been born again, my friend, you simply cannot move this way.

It's beyond you as it was beyond me and everybody else. But if you have the Spirit of God in your heart, if you've been born anew, if you're a new creature, if your sins are washed away, this is your prerogative. This is your privilege.

This is your calling. This is part of the wonder of it all. Without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

Or take Paul in Galatians, in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love. Even so you see faith is but the fundamental ingredient.

The words of Jesus envisage an active virile faith, in the words used, lays hold upon God. Our fathers used to say, have much to say about that, laying hold upon God. I remember some of the older saints in the circles where I was brought up as a Christian, they often used to speak of this, come on now, one of the elders would say, come and let us lay hold upon God.

And I didn't know for a long time what they meant, but I learned. To lay hold upon God is to come into such intimacy with Him that when you're going out through the door you know you go together. You know anything of this? Neither is that the sum of what this verse refers to.

Faith, active faith, needs to be able to lay hold on God as a child lays hold of its parent. That's the kind of intimacy envisaged here and it is necessarily one in which God is the one who teaches, corrects, commands and controls, and His children are not His creature. They hold His hand, they cling to Him, and it is in that embrace they leave the hallowed place.

Privacy without such intimacy is an empty shell. I know some people who have a private chapel. I remember when I was a student going to preach in a very certain place, I better not mention names, and I was staying the night in the castle with Lord and Lady so-and-so.

And the service next morning was to be, was to take place in the chapel of the castle. And I asked Lord so-and-so, how often do you meet the Lord here in the chapel? Oh, once every Sunday, he said. You see, there was a man who went for seven days, and the chapel was there, a place to meet with God.

But the heart to meet with God, the grace to meet with God, the spirit to meet with God was absent. I'm glad to say that was not so to the end of his days. And on the occasion to which I'm referring, it was totally absent.

He was dead in trespasses and sins. But the Lord called him out of darkness, changed him into a new man, and that chapel became filled with praying men and women. Privacy without such intimacy is an empty shell.

There is no greater tragedy than to have a private chapel where you may regularly meet with God. And yet when you get into your private chapel, you're no nearer God than you are walking down Blue Street, no more aware of him. The righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees on the level of prayer has to be fashioned in the vital encounter of a child of God with his heavenly Father.

And the encounter must be so real and so deep that when a child moves out to his duty in this world, he carries the sense of the presence of his Father with him. Thirdly, we need simplicity. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Simplicity, artlessness. That is, the absence of any attempt to play tricks or play games with God, or even with men.

Such simplicity, of course, is nothing less than just downright honesty. Downright honesty. The attempt to be clever in the presence of the Almighty God is worse than folly.

It reflects a view of God and of oneself which are both abhorrent in any context, but especially in the supposed exercise of prayer. Jesus goes far to define the kind of simplicity he requires by contrasting his demands with the familiar contemporary practice of the scribes and Pharisees. The pagans of the day employed what our Lord refers to as babbling.

And one writer describes it in these terms. Let me read to you a few lines. Some pagans thought that if they named all their gods, and they had many, and addressed their petitions to each of them, and then repeated themselves a few times, they would have a better chance of receiving an answer.

Jesus tells his contemporary Jewish hearers that much of their praying is akin to this babbling found among pagans. And I am certain that if he were addressing us directly today, says this writer, he would tell us exactly the same thing. Prayer should not consist of heaped up phrases, idle repetitions, and the ridiculous assumption that the probability of an answer is in proportion to the total number of the words in our prayer.

And yet we sometimes think so. We need a simplicity towards God. We know that he knows everything before we tell him everything, yet he has told us that he will be inquired of even for these things.

Very well then, let's tell him with all simplicity and honesty the thing as it seems to us, and leave it with him. But we do not score points with God by the addition of words. The quality of righteousness which Jesus demands in our prayer, in our prayer life, avoids all such idle repetitions.

Now I'm going to close. There is another section here, and I only want to say a word about it. The model prayer that illustrates the main principle, or principles thus enunciated.

We've already spent a number of weeks on the study of the Lord's Prayer, and the only one thing I want to say at this stage, I want you to notice that the principle to which we've referred already, is most evident in the Lord's Prayer. That is, the righteousness which Jesus requires of us, is a righteousness that is made, that is produced, as God personally exercises control of us. Now listen to this model prayer.

The model prayer begins with God, does not begin with human needs at all. Now that is strange, because most of us begin and end with needs. And we're told of course to bring our needs to God, so don't let's misunderstand that.

But it does not begin with human needs, and with human problems. It begins with God. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name.

And that's the first thing it says, it begins with a worship of God. Just imagine it. This is the way to begin praying, with God.

Get your mind, get your soul, get yourself focused on God. And the first thing that we should seek to do is to set the name of God above every name. Your name be sanctified, that's what it says literally.

Set apart from every other name. Kings and priests and emperors and presidents and rulers, what are they? The name of the Lord is above them all. And in our estimation, he is so, and we tell him so.

And that's where prayer begins. With lofty thoughts of God, telling him his worth, in our estimation, as revealed in his word and in his Son, and in our own experience by the Holy Spirit. Then the petitioner expresses his primary concern to be, not for himself, in any sense at all, but for the coming of God's kingdom, and the doing of God's will on earth, as it is done in heaven.

What praying is this? It's so contrary to the way we pray, is it not? Your will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven. Your kingdom come, starting with his name and moving in this direction. You see, he's concerned with God.

The heart's taken up with God. Against that background, the worship and devotion, of worship and devotion, the petitioner's faith then rises to seek from God, his Father, everything that he really needs, spiritually and materially. As one really dedicated to God, the petitioner asks and trusts his Heavenly Father, first for daily bread, temporal needs.

Give us, not this day, but really, day by day, our daily bread. He's not asking the Lord, give me such a stock today, that I won't need to come back to you again for the next three years, but rather, please give me today's portion today, and I'll come back tomorrow, when I need something tomorrow. I'll live with you from day to day.

Please feed me from your hand. But not only, not only material needs, he asks also for daily pardon. I believe the thought of daily bread leads on to the thought of daily pardon, spiritual well-being, and daily

deliverance from the evil one.

You see, he moves from the material to the spiritual, and very simply, in very few words, he brings them all before God, because he's aware of God. He's under the rule of God. He's under the eye of God.

He's got the ear of God. See, this is what prayer is. And there, in communion with God, he kind of says to the Lord, now these are my needs, I look to you for them as my father, for out of grace and mercy, please give me these things that I need.

Moreover, here we come to a conclusion. If the longer ending of the Lord's prayer found in some manuscripts, and included in some translations as authentic, the prayer ends likewise with God, more than with man. You remember the older ending? It's in the King James, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever.

You say, I never had a prayer like that. No, you didn't, my friend. Say it based on this one.

You start with God, then you sandwich your own needs between the glory of God, and the worship of God on the one hand, and the concession of glory to God on the other end. And in between, you bring your material needs, and your spiritual spiritual needs, briefly, and just leave them with him. Now the righteousness that Jesus requires on the subjects of his kingdom, in terms of prayer, is of this order.

He wants us to be real with God, not to play at prayer or anything else. He wants us to be real. He wants us to be effective.

He wants us to be genuine. He doesn't want us to be hypocrites, and act, and play the part. He wants us to be real.

What then have we encountered here? We have encountered a clear-cut outline of the righteousness which the King requires of all the subjects of his kingdom. There are no exceptions. If in chapter 5 he stressed his moral demands, in chapter 6 he matches them with such religious requirements as constitute this lofty righteousness, giving to the needy, prayer, and fasting.

I've not dealt with fasting. And all because Jesus wants us to be real. Brothers and sisters, have we strayed in these areas? Have we been less than real at times? Is it true, is it true, that our prayers are sometimes mere words without very little heart or meaning? Oh may the God of all grace come down upon us afresh and win us back to himself, and enable us, enable us, oh enable us to walk the way the Master would lead his people.

You see, walking in the footmarks of our Lord, walking in this way, there is no experience in life nor in death, but that you may call upon your Father and know his presence. He's the perfect example in prayer, private and public. I have no time to enlarge upon that.

But what I want you to notice is this, even after the ignominy of bearing sin upon the cross, and bearing the curse of sin, so that it appeared as if God had turned his back upon him, his last word is, Father into your hands I commit my spirit. Now I don't want you to miss that. Whatever had happened in between, his Father was there.

He could see his hands and his arms. Into your hands I commit my spirit. And his spirit was safe there.

How do I know? Blessed be God on the morning of the third day he rose again from the dead. And the spirit brought the body, and the body and the spirit moved about among the disciples for 40 days until he ascended. There's no question about that.

This is the way into a life of righteousness, as Jesus calls it. The kingdom life, kingdom living on the way to our eternal abode. God grant us his grace, some of us to start afresh today.

Maybe some of us here to start off on this road for the first time. The Spirit of God is assuring you that really you're not a child of God. You're not a subject of the kingdom.

Give him your heart. Give him your mind. Give him your will.

Yield him yourself this morning, and walk out with him. But if he's calling you back from some avenue of wandering, then come back. Start again.

Oh, the matchless grace of God. He is able to make all things new. Let us pray.

Father, in the company of people such as this, no two of us are in exactly the same spiritual or perhaps material situation, but you know us all. We appeal to you, our Father, who knoweth each of us by name. By your Holy Spirit, continue to apply your word to us that we may come to know you truly, not as a paper God, but as the ever-living Lord, our heavenly Father.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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