

The Prayer Closet

by Keith Malcomson

Christ teaches His disciples the importance of a private prayer life, shutting out distractions, and praying directly to the Father, promising a reward for those who prioritize closet prayer.

Scripture: John 16:23

Topics: "Private Prayer", "Lord's Prayer"

Description

Keith Malcomson preaches on the importance of private, closet prayer as taught by Jesus in Matthew 6:6. He emphasizes the need for biblical teaching on prayer to aid in faith and inspire believers to pray. Christ instructs His disciples to pray in secret, away from the eyes of men, and promises that the Father who sees in secret will reward openly. The sermon highlights the significance of finding a private place for prayer, shutting out distractions, and praying directly to the Father. Malcomson explains the Lord's Prayer as a guide for private prayer, focusing on God's glory and kingdom before personal needs, and ending with praise and adoration.

Transcript

Mt.6:6, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

In two places in the scriptures we read of the Lord teaching his disciples "how" to pray. One was here in Matthew 6 and the other was in Luke 11. In the second reference they ask "Lord, teach us to pray" (v1). This shows us that there is a need for some biblical teaching on prayer. Such teaching is an aid to faith for faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Teaching on prayer brings faith into the heart in order to encourage us and to inspire us to pray. There is also a need for some practical instruction on prayer and Christ gives it to us in our text. We should never think that having the Spirit means a negation of practical instruction.

When You Pray

Christ takes it for granted that His disciples will pray. The expectation that a Christian will pray is not legalism. It is life. It is the evidence of life. It is the fruit of life. Christ takes it for granted that the praying Christian will seek out a place of privacy for prayer. Twice in this chapter He says "when thou doest alms" (v2-3), which is an act of showing charity to the poor. Twice He speaks of "when ye fast" (v16-17), which is the act of abstaining from food while praying. And three times He speaks of "when thou prayest" (v5-7).

With all three of these things he warns about the danger of hypocrisy. The Greek word used here for "hypocrite" is an actor on the public stage. It was a performer who wore a mask and put himself into a character for an audience. He says that hypocrites "love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men" (v5). Hypocrites get nothing from private prayer. They choose the synagogue. They choose the public place with an audience. The great cure and preventative for hypocrisy in public prayer is private prayer. We must give secret prayer before God the most vital place in our lives. Behind all public prayer is a hidden prayer life. A real disciple will maintain a place of prayer in which God the Father is the only listener and seer.

Your Closet

Christ says "when thou prayest, enter into thy closet" (v6). Christ expects his disciples to have a "closet" to aid their prayer life. The word used here in the Greek is tameion. It is used four times in the New Testament and this is the first time. In chapter 24:26 it is translated as "secret chambers" and in Luke 12:24 as "storehouses." In ancient days it was a small cupboard or store room in a Jewish home. It was a private chamber over the porch or entrance of the house. It was a room sufficient for an individual to be alone in order to gain some privacy. We read in Acts 10 that when Peter was staying with Simon the tanner in Joppa that he "went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour" (v9). Peter sought out a private place to pray in the home of his friend.

But Christ is not teaching that it has to specifically be a small room in your house. We see from His life that "closet prayer" is just finding a private secluded place. In Matthew 14:23, we read that "he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone" and again in Mark 1:35, "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." When He speaks about you having a closet it means you ought to have a private familiar place that you go to in order to pray. It can be a room in your house, a shed at the end of the garden, a beach, a hill, a river--anywhere--as long as it gives you an undisturbed place away from others where you can be alone in prayer.

Of course you can pray anywhere and at anytime yet Christ instructs us to have a set place that is our personal closet. He says "enter thy closet." There has to be an active entering of the closet. He commands us to enter 'our' personal closet. We read concerning Ezekiel, "And the hand of the LORD was there upon me; and he said unto me, Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee" (3:22). A place of private communion with your Heavenly Father is vital.

Shut Thy Door

Christ says we are to shut the door of our closet before we pray. Shutting the door is a vital part of effectual prayer. By shutting the door Christ means we must close the door on every distraction. A thousand things distract us from prayer as well as during prayer. There is no point having a place and time to pray if when you get there it is invaded by distractions that hinder our prayers. We must take action to shut out distractions before we pray. Christ knows that this must be done before praying. This should become a normal part of our prayer life. As we go to prayer shut the door on the way. A man who tries to pray with an open door gets nowhere.

We must identify what distractions that hinder our prayer life then we must actively shut them out of the place and time of prayer. The distraction could be noise, people, business, work or many other activities. They could be very legitimate things that are vital and important for you to deal with yet they must not

hinder or replace private prayer. Nothing is more important than private prayer. But private prayer will never make or allow you to neglect other responsibilities outside the door. When you truly pray behind a closed door you are more ready than ever to face and accomplish what awaits you when you open the door again. Susanna Wesley had nineteen children of which nine died. Her days were full and busy but in her youth she had promised the Lord to keep a time of closet-prayer. She accomplished this by daily having a time when she put her apron over her head in the middle of the living room which signalled to her brood of children that it was her prayer time and that she was not to be disturbed. This became her prayer closet. It was in that unusual closet that she was enabled to raise her children including two revivalists who were used of God to change the spiritual climate of Britain.

The distractions could also be of the mind with worries, burdens, problems, to do lists and a drifting mind. All of these need to be closed down or controlled. We don't empty our minds in prayer but we do actively set distractions aside. I have often found the very best preparation for private prayer is to read a chapter of God's Word. When we actively turn our thoughts heavenward and bring the written thoughts of God to bear upon our mind then distractions evaporate or are put in their right place and perspective in order to enable us to pray effectually.

Pray to thy Father

Having entered your closet and shut your door He next instructs us to "pray to thy Father which is in secret." Please note that we are taught to pray directly to the Father--not to the Son or the Spirit. Jesus said "...in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you" (Jn.16:23). Although we speak to Christ, worship Him and adore Him we don't ask Him for things in prayer. Neither are we taught to pray "to" the Spirit. Not once in our New Testament do we read of prayer to the Spirit. In fact prayer to the Spirit contradicts the simple teaching of Christ. We are to pray to the Father, through the name and authority of the Son, by the power and help of the Holy Spirit. Any form of prayer to angels, Mary or the saints is an abomination.

When we say "Our Father" we are acknowledging that we have been born into the family of God. The term "Father" is used of one who is over a house. He is responsible, He is a provider and He is the head of the spiritual home. "Father" speaks of an intimate family relationship. Prayer is based upon personal relationship. There is no casualness in calling Him our Heavenly Father. He is still also called Holy Father and Righteous Father. We pray to our Father in Heaven not to God or Christ in us. Mystical prayer to the Christ in us is utterly unbiblical.

Christ here teaches what is commonly called The Lord's Prayer in the context of private, closet prayer (v6, 9-13). This prayer is the most abused prayer in the world. It is usually used publically, as a "vain repetition" to be seen of men without the heart and mind being engaged (v5, 7). This prayer which He taught is given to help us when we pray to the Father in private. We don't just rely upon an emotion, feeling or impulse in prayer. Our minds are active and our hearts are warmed with clear distinct biblical teaching on prayer. The Lord's Prayer is a guide, an aid and a structure. He teaches that we pray in this "manner" not in these actual words. This was not just given as a 'said prayer.' It's an example.

Contained in it are headings upon which we approach the Lord in distinct requests. It starts with the Father in Heaven; not with man, his needs and his struggles. The first three requests have to do with God's cause in the earth. First His name being made hallowed or holy in the earth, followed by requests for His will to be done and His kingdom to come. These must dominate prayer and be the true initial focus and vision of

prayer. Then we come to our personal needs which have four headings. It begins with our daily bread--that is the practical physical natural needs before asking about our spiritual needs. This is followed by prayers for forgiveness, those concerning temptation and last of all a prayer for to be delivered from evil. But that is not the end. He teaches us to return to praise and adoration of the Father before finishing our private prayer and leaving the prayer closet: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

Reward

We are given the promise of reward in relation to closet prayer: "and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." Private prayer holds little attraction to the hypocrite and the carnal. But those who are truly after God find that the secret place of prayer is one of the most rewarding things in their entire life. Of course they must fight through distractions, feelings, failures, opposition and tiredness. But they are drawn, encouraged and strengthened by the promise of spiritual rewards. We must encourage ourselves that our Heavenly Father hears and sees. But more than that He answers and He rewards.

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