

(Basics) 54. Not Praying With Meaningless Repetition

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of genuine communication with God in prayer, warning against seeking human recognition and meaningless repetition.

Duration: 12:32

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-14, Mark 14:32-42, Luke 11:5-8, Luke 18:1-7

Topics: "Effective Prayer", "Sincere Worship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the topic of prayer and emphasizes the importance of genuine and heartfelt communication with God. He distinguishes between meaningful repetition in prayer, as seen in the parable of the persistent widow and the man asking for food, and meaningless repetition, which Jesus warns against. The speaker also highlights the danger of seeking recognition from others for our prayer and fasting, as this can hinder our relationship with God. He concludes by cautioning against mindlessly repeating the Lord's Prayer, emphasizing that God values sincerity and authenticity in our prayers.

Transcript

One of the most important things in the life of a Christian is talking to God. Have you ever thought about that? One of the greatest privileges we have is that we can talk to God just like we talk to any other man, and we can hear Him talk to us as well. And we want to continue looking at what Jesus spoke and taught His disciples about speaking to God, what we call prayer, communicating with God, talking to Him.

And we saw last week how the most important thing about prayer is not the words, but the attitude of heart with which we approach God. And the most important thing Jesus said in this connection was that we should not act, we should not pray in order to impress men. We must seek honor either from God or from men.

For example, if you pray and you let other people know that you are a great man of prayer or a woman of prayer, and they are always talking about the times you spend in prayer, etc., and the hours and the days you spend in praying and fasting and things like that, the chances are that you will not get any answer to your prayers. Do you know that? You can pray and fast for days and get no answer from God for any of those prayers if you did it to show men. If you talk about it afterwards to other people, you know I was praying and fasting for three days or seven days before God.

And do you know what Jesus said about that? In verse 5 of Matthew chapter 6, He said about such people, they already have their reward in full. What is their reward? They wanted the honor of men that they are very godly men and women. And they got that reputation from men.

Men began to think that they are very godly people. And Jesus said that's what they wanted and that's what they got. They are not going to get anything from God.

So all that prayer and fasting was wasted. Now on the other hand, here is another person who doesn't let anyone know about his prayer life. It's all in secret.

He shuts the room. Maybe naturally his wife or those living at home will know. But he tries his best to conceal it and hide it from as many people as possible and never talks about his prayer life with anyone.

He prays to the Father in secret. He doesn't get any reward from people because nobody knows anything about his praying. But he gets a full reward from God because God sees him in secret.

Now my question is, dear friend, which of these two type of people do you want to be? Do you want a reward from men where you get a reputation as a godly man or a godly woman or a man of prayer or a woman of prayer? Or do you want God to approve of your life and answer your prayer and bless you? He will reward you openly. People will see when there is a blessing of God upon your life that you are one who prays to God in secret. And God rewards you.

So that's the first thing that Jesus said in relation to prayer. He said this is how you should not pray. And if Jesus said that as the number one danger in prayer, then we can be pretty sure that that is the thing that we must beware of the most.

You know man is basically religious. And a lot of his religion he likes to show other people to get a reputation before people that we are very religious holy people. And one way we get that reputation is by letting people know how much we pray and how much we fast and how much money we give for the Lord's work or what sacrifices we have made for the Lord, etc.

And Jesus said be very careful that you don't tell anybody any of these things. Let God see it and that's enough. The other thing that Jesus said in Matthew 6 that we should not do is in verse 7. Where he said when you are praying, don't use meaningless repetition as the heathen people do.

Because those heathen people think that they will be heard for their many words. This is the second mistake that a lot of people make when they pray. They think that God will hear them if they use many words and keep on repeating, repeating, repeating, repeating the same thing again and again and again as though God were deaf and He can't hear you if you say it once.

And they think that the reason why God hears some people is because they pray for a long time and those who pray for a short time God does not hear. This is another heathen concept. You know, you think that if you pray for one hour God would definitely have heard you.

But if you pray for one minute, God won't listen to that because it's too short. Where did that idea come from? When Peter was walking on the water and he turned his eyes away from Jesus and he began to sink in the sea. He turned to the Lord and said, Lord save me.

One or two seconds, that was all his prayer. And the Lord answered him. How long does your prayer have to be before God answers it? Peter's prayer was less than two seconds.

So, it's not a question of length of time. It's not a question of repetition, particularly meaningless repetition. We read in the Garden of Gethsemane that Jesus prayed the same thing three times.

But it was not meaningless repetition, it was from the heart. Sometimes when you have a burden in your heart, you take it before God and you take it again and you take it again and you take it again until the burden goes. So, that's not the type of repetition Jesus is speaking about because Jesus himself said in another parable on prayer, he said about a widow who went to a judge, that's in Luke chapter 18 verses 1 to 7, and kept on asking for one thing.

Give me justice against my enemy. And she went back and said the same thing again and the same thing again and the same thing again. So, finally the judge heard it and Jesus said, that's how you got to pray.

Select, cry out to him day and night and don't you think God will avenge them, Jesus said. In another parable he spoke on prayer, he spoke about a man who went to his neighbor and said a guest has come to my house, I don't have any food, can you give me some food? And the neighbor wouldn't open the door and he kept on knocking until the neighbor opened the door. There again the lesson is the same.

It is persistence in asking for something again and again and again. So, we're not talking about that type of persistence which Jesus himself encouraged in Luke chapter 11 and Luke chapter 18. Here he's talking about meaningless repetition.

For example, immediately after this prayer, after this advice of what Jesus was telling them how not to pray, he told them how to pray. He said, when you pray say, Our Father who art in heaven, and so on in Matthew 6 verse 9 onwards. Now, you can take that prayer and repeat it meaninglessly before God.

You just repeat it like a parrot. Supposing you say that prayer twenty times. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come and so on and you say it twenty times.

Is God going to hear it? Another fellow prays the same prayer fifty times. Is God going to hear him more? Some people have that idea. That if you keep on repeating that prayer thirty, forty times, the more times you repeat it, the more God's going to hear you.

Jesus said very clearly here in verse 7, that is a heathen idea. Not at all. It's the heart that determines what God hears.

If it doesn't come from the heart and it's a meaningless repetition from your mouth, it has no value at all. Don't think that God will hear you because you use many words. It's not in the number of words that determines whether God hears us or not.

It's a condition of our heart. So with these two warnings concerning how we should not pray, one, seeking the honor of men and acting and pretending to be very holy and secondly, repeating ourselves meaninglessly again and again and thinking that if we pray for a long time, God will listen to us. These are the two things Jesus warned against severely.

Only after that introduction did he go on to tell his disciples, now I'll tell you how you should pray. Don't be like the heathen. Don't act before men as if you are holy by your prayers.

Don't pray with meaningless repetition. And in this connection, before he began teaching them the prayer, he said one more thing. He said, don't be like the heathen because, verse 8, your father knows what you need before you ask him.

That's a very, very important thing to remember. See, when you pray to God for something, you're not informing God about a need which he did not know about. See, if you ring up on the telephone and tell a man, sudden such a thing has happened or sudden such a thing is needed, that may be information which that man never got before.

But when you tell God something, Lord so-and-so is sick. Well, he already knew that. Lord so-and-so needs money, perhaps, to live.

God knows that. There is absolutely nothing that God doesn't know. Please remember that when you pray, that your prayer is not a means of informing God what he didn't know.

And yet some people act like that. Or sometimes they think that prayer is trying to force God to have compassion on some person whom God is a bit hard-hearted towards. That's all ridiculous.

God has more compassion for everybody in the world than you and I can ever have. And he knows everything that happened long before you and I heard of it. And he knows our need before we ask him.

So all these things are not the reasons why we pray. We pray as an expression of our dependence upon God and our faith and our testimony that he is the one who provides all our needs. Once these wrong ideas are cleared out of the way, then we can pray exactly the way God wants us to pray.

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