

Matthew 6:7-15 Kingdom Piety 2

Introduction

Jesus shifted from Matthew 5 to Matthew 6 from our public spiritual life and an emphasis on loving people to our private spiritual life and an emphasis on loving God. Jesus has targeted the Pharisees in chapters 5 and 6 as exemplars of human religion. They are the ones whose righteousness is not high enough in chapter 5, and the unspoken hypocrites of chapter 6. In one sense, they are an easy target; often judgmental, legalistic, and pompous. But Jesus is not saying that they are doing too much. Jesus is saying that they are misguided in their zeal. That their commitment to the details of Law misses the more challenging, holistic intent of the Law. We are not to love people only through formal legal and religious commitment. We are to go the extra mile - to love as God loves, from the heart and with sacrifice.

Furthermore, the performance of external religious ceremony does not mean you love God, even if you are very good at it and you sacrifice a lot of time doing it. Having a quiet time every single day, does not necessarily mean, you love God. Attending mass every morning and evening is impressive, but it does not mean you necessarily love God. Why you are performing pious actions is critical. It is so easy to slip into some kind of performance; to put on a mask; to play a part; to believe we are earning something from God. He owes us. Hypocrisy is in all of us to some degree. Just like anger, and lust, and pride, and selfishness. It's there. And it does not do to deny the reality of the temptation to play-act. The solution is not to stop practicing acts of piety or devotion, any more than solving insincerity by stopping acts of love and care. We admit the hypocrisy inherent in our human nature. We face it at the root in our mind and heart. Yes, we have mixed motives when we pray, and when we worship, and when we fast. We admit that the sin nature is still active in us. We confess sinful behavior when God makes it aware to us. And then, we continue on in our acts of devotion, because a part of us values God. A part of us really wants relationship with God.

The emphasis in Matthew 6:1-18 on doing acts of devotion in secret is an emphasis on doing acts of devotion with the right motive. Corporate acts of devotion are also pleasing to God. We worship in communities. Jesus challenges us to private devotions as a way of challenging us to evaluate our motivation for all acts of devotion. What outcome or reward are we seeking in our acts of devotion? Are we motivated by the goal of being seen, approved, noticed by people? If so, we have our reward in full. Or are we motivated to meet with God, to know Him, to love Him? When God is our goal, He sees that and rewards us in a special way.

I left two questions from Matthew 6:1-18 unanswered in the last lesson. We will address those two questions in this lesson. One, what is this reward that we will receive from our acts of devotion? And two, what should our private meeting with God look like? I will start with the second question and then come back to the question of reward.

What should our private meeting with God look like? Do we have any direction on how to meet with God in private? Yes, we do. That's exactly what Jesus gives us in His extended development on prayer. Remember from our last lesson that Jesus used parallel language for the base examples of giving, prayer, and fasting. And He makes the middle example of prayer stand out by adding on some specific guidance on how to pray. To remind you, here is the base example that we addressed last time, Matthew 6:5-6.

“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 (6:5a).”

“Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full (6:5b).”

“But when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret...(6a)”

“...and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you (6b).”

The additional material comes in verses 7-15. Just like this base example, Jesus first gives us some guidance on how *not* to pray – what we’re not to do - and then He gives us guidance on *how* to pray. So here is our structure for this lesson. First, we’ll address how not to pray in 6:7-8; then we’ll address how to pray in 6:9-15; and in the conclusion we will come back to that question of reward.

I. How not to pray: Repetitious prayer (6:7–8)

⁷ And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Jesus has already said that we ought not pray showy prayers like the Pharisees who are more concerned about displaying their devotion for others to see. He adds here in 6:7-8 that we also ought not pray thoughtless, repetitious prayers like non-Jews did.

This whole section of 6:1-18 gets to the heart of the 3rd Commandment, “Do not take the name of your Lord God in vain.” We take God’s name in vain when we use it to draw attention to ourselves, like the Pharisees. And we take his name in vain when we use spiritual practices as a way to require God to give us what we want, like the Gentiles try to do.

They use their gods as sources of spiritual power that can be manipulated through the right kind of prayer formula. But true prayer is not a formula that we employ to force God’s hand. It is not the Sorcerer’s stone. It is not alchemy. It is not the invocation of spiritual power. It is not “faith plus zeal plus the right posture plus enough tears plus honest confession gets me what I want.” It is not “name it, claim it,” as though the sincerity of my faith, requires God to fulfill my request. It is not the same words over and over and over; “if I’ll put in the time, God will give me.” It is not ending in the name of Jesus. No formula requires God – forces God - to respond. That is treating God as a spiritual power source that we can control. And to do that is to take God’s name in vain. He exists to serve us.

Jesus is pretty direct here. He says, “God already knows what you need before you ask him.” Treat God as God! You’re communicating to God that He is God. You are not telling Him what you need to inform Him as though He doesn’t know. And He is not going to be impressed or pressured by your repetition. You are not praying to force His hand. I’ve often been asked in student ministry why should we bother to pray at all if God already knows what we need, and if God is going to do whatever is according to His will anyway. That’s a fair question. My response is this, “Is that really why you pray? To get stuff from God? Can you think of no other reason to pray than to get stuff?” The the only reason to pray is to get stuff, and God already knows what you need, and He’s going to do what He wants anyway - fair question. But is there another reason to pray?

Prayer is not a magical formula. Prayer is communication. The fundamental point of prayer is relationship with God. I tell God what I need because open and honest communication is essential to relationship. I have a need to be seen, to be heard. I also need Him to help me see my need as He sees it. I need help lifting my eyes off of myself, off of my circumstances, onto Him. I am dependent on Him, and saying that out loud to Him helps the reality of my dependence sink into me. Sometimes I am praying not because I believe but because I need help believing.

And once I have communicated my wants, and needs, and hopes, and fears to God, I need help trusting Him with the response. I did not tell my dad things about my struggles only because I thought he would fix everything. I mean, sometimes I was hoping he would fix everything. But on a deeper heart level, I told him things because he was my dad and I wanted him to know, and I wanted to talk to someone who loves me and who I know is for me.

If we are not supposed to pray in such a way as to be seen by people and we are not to pray the same words over and over in repetition to force God’s hand, how are we to pray? Jesus tells us in the second part of this section.

II. How to pray: A model prayer (6:9–15)

Matthew 6:9-15:

⁹ “Pray, then, in this way:

‘Our Father who is in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.

¹⁰ ‘Your kingdom come.
Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ ‘Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² ‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ ‘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.’

The genius of Jesus. Simple and profound. Jesus does not give us a set of guidelines on how to pray. He gives us an example prayer. But it is more than an example prayer. This prayer is clearly not meant to be simply repeated. One of the great ironies is how often this prayer is simply repeated, and that coming right after Jesus’ instructions not to come to God with repetitious prayer. Don’t just pray this over and over and over. The words are to be absorbed, reflected on, prayed back to God thoughtfully. This is not how we should pray, meaning, “Pray these exact words.” This is how we should pray, meaning, “Follow this example.” The only other version of this prayer in the Bible is in Luke 11:2-4. Catching Jesus praying, the disciples ask Him to teach them how to pray. And concerning the choice of words in both prayers, the one in Matthew and the one in Luke, there is only slight difference in the words that are used; and some difference is to be expected since Matthew and Luke are both translating Jesus’ original Aramaic into Greek. But Luke’s version is noticeably shorter. He leaves out some of the phrases. So, either Jesus or Luke felt free to abbreviate the words of the prayer in a different context. The exact words of the prayer are not magical; they are not critical. This is a model to help us pray. If you repeat these words, say them so that the words will move you in your own prayer; will cause you to think.

The prayer has an address followed by six requests. Or maybe seven requests, if you divide the last one into two. Some Bibles end the prayer with a doxology or a statement of praise. I will discuss the doxology first because it is almost certainly not original to Matthew’s gospel.

“For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

That line ends the version of the Lord’s prayer in the Moravian hymnbook I grew up with. I love the line. It is a very Biblical idea. Here is a similar statement of praise in a prayer from David recorded in 1 Chronicles 29:11.

¹¹ “Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all.

So this doxology that is sometimes added to the prayer in Matthew is certainly in line with biblical statements of praise. But the line does not show up in several of the earliest manuscripts of Matthew and it does not show up in several Church Fathers who quote the prayer.¹

Modern Bible’s treat this doxology in different ways. My Croatian Bible and my ESV journal simply omit it without a note. My New King James Bible includes it with a reference that it does not appear in the earliest manuscripts. My NASB includes it, but with brackets and a footnote. And my NIV excludes it from the text, but includes it as a reference.

¹ “This well-known conclusion...is absent, e.g., from \aleph , B, D, f^1 , various Latin and Coptic versions, and numerous church fathers.” Craig Blomberg. *The New American Commentary: Matthew* (Vol. 22). (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992) 121.

The early Christian practice of saying this prayer corporately in worship provides a likely explanation for its presence in later manuscripts of Matthew. Jewish prayers regularly ended with a statement of praise. It would have felt very natural to add on a line at the end of the prayer when praying it together in worship. The Didache, a late first century manual on basic Christian practice, includes the whole of the Lord's prayer with this final line, "for Thine is the power and the glory forever."²

If this practice of adding a doxology became standard early in churches, it is possible that a scribe added the doxology into an early manuscript copy of Matthew. The scribe may have done it intentionally, feeling that the manuscript was missing the doxology that was supposed to be there; or the scribe may have added it subconsciously, being so used to saying the prayer this way that he added it without even thinking.

I have three thoughts about this statement of praise. First, however much I like the doxology from my own childhood, my primary commitment is to the Word of God as it was originally communicated. So, I will not be addressing this line in this lesson because it is almost certainly not in Matthew's original.

Second, I do not have a problem when churches add a doxology to the end of a Scriptural prayer. Craig Blomberg comments, "Christians regularly and rightly utter many things in prayer that do not directly quote the autographs of Scripture."³ I think he is right. The line provides an appropriate response to the Scripture we have just prayed. There is no problem adding this when we pray, but we ought to be equally comfortable not adding it. And I think modern Bible versions should move it to the reference section or at least set it off in brackets, so that we know it's not original.

Third, however we pray this in corporate worship, with or without the doxology, we need to take seriously what Jesus just said,

When you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them...

The problem is not with repeating the words of the prayer. The problem is, thoughtlessly repeating the words of the prayer. The prayer was meant to guide our thoughts as we pray, not replace our thinking in prayer.

How, then, are we to pray? Let's move through each line and think about each one, starting with the address,

Address: "Our Father who is in heaven."

Jesus teaches us to address God as, Father. The Church has been doing that for 2,000 years so, of course, it seems quite natural to us, but in Jesus' day it is a new kind of familiarity, specifically now being encouraged under the New Covenant. It is a very rare designation for Jews to give to God in the first century,⁴ which is not surprising when we look at the Jewish prayer book. Out of all 150 Psalms in the book of Psalms, God is not once addressed as Father by the person praying. He is imagined only three times as father. Father of the fatherless; father of the son of David; compassionate like a father. But he is mostly addressed in the Psalms as, "God," or, "Lord."

It seems to me God wanted to emphasize the holiness of His nature in His Old Covenant relationship with His people, until that time when He would reveal the solution for their sin. The three-fold division of the Tabernacle emphasized division. There was an outer court, a holy place, and a holy of holies. Much of the ceremonial code emphasized a distinction between holy and unholy, clean and unclean.

² A. Roberts, J. Donaldson and A. C. Coxe, eds. (1886). *The Lord's Teaching through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations in The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Vol. 7). (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886) 379.

³ Craig Blomberg. *The New American Commentary: Matthew* (Vol. 22). (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992) 121.

⁴ D. A. Carson. *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5-10*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999) 67.

It's not that individual Jews were kept from enjoying a personal, intimate relationship with God. We see deep, heartfelt intimacy with God in the Psalms of David. Still, the Old Covenant system of worship intentionally put stress on the holiness and authority of God. The believing Jews believed God would make a way for them to be forgiven, but that way remained shrouded in mystery until the coming of Jesus Christ. Then, immediately after Jesus has paid the true price for our sin, while He's still on the cross, the curtain barring access into the holy of holies was supernaturally ripped in two by God. With the mystery of our forgiveness going to be made known in Jesus, God has chosen to emphasize the intimate relationship that each one of us can experience because of Jesus. He wants us, in this New Covenant to relate to Him as father, to emphasize that intimate relationship that we have with Him.

This is not the first time Jesus refers to God as "our Father" in the Sermon on the Mount. And all these references really would have stood out to Jesus' audience. This attractive, maybe even a little edgy identification with God as Father. Our minds, we probably don't even hear it in the text, because we're so used to it. But Jesus' audience would have heard this as a different way to approach holy God. Here are several of them.

Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (5:16).

Love your enemies... so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven (5:44-45).

Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect (5:48).

Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you (6:4, 6, 18).

Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things (6:32).

How much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask him (7:11).

He who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter the kingdom (7:21).

Those are all in the Sermon on the Mount. "Father" emphasizes the nature of our relationship with God as a love relationship. We love Him. He loves us. Father also emphasizes that this love relationship is a relationship of authority and dependence. He is not our heavenly friend. He is our heavenly Father. We can ask anything of Him. But we trust Him to decide how He will answer us. We are not in authority over Him. He is in authority over us. We depend on Him in love. He cares for us in love.

One more point. Jesus did not tell us to pray, "My Father in heaven." He told us to pray, "Our Father in heaven." This includes the idea that He is my father. If He is our father, He is also my father. At the same time, it challenges us to think of ourselves as part of a family. Jesus is encouraging us to pray this prayer in secret, alone with God in our room with the door closed, so we're not just praying by ourselves for ourselves. The "our" is encouraging us to pray all these things for ourselves and also for all of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We're praying as though we belong to a family.

That's the address. We address God, we start our prayer, "Our Father in heaven." Jesus moves from this simple, profound address straight into request. Six requests. But we do not start with requests to meet our needs. The first three requests are not requests for us. They are requests for God. Each one uses the word "your, your, your." Then we're going to get prayer requests directly about us, using the word, "our, our, our."

Request #1: "Hallowed by your name."

Hallowed means to be made holy or to be sanctified, set apart as pure. God's name is already holy. If we are asking that His name be hallowed, we are asking that His name would be recognized as holy and treated as holy.

As we are going to see, every one of these requests that Jesus encourages us to make can be taken in more than one sense. The requests point us in the right direction, but they are short, and simple, and a little abstract. We have to imagine the sense that Jesus intends and in each case we can imagine

some different things. He does not want to give us exact words of what we are to think and pray. He gives us the prayer in such a way that we need to be actively engaged with God as we pray.

What does it mean, to recognize God's name as holy? What does that look like? And who should be recognizing God's name as holy? And why do we want God's name to be recognized as holy?

Let's start with that question, the "why." Why do we want God's name to be recognized as holy? Because we love God and we think He is awesome! He is the source of all that is beautiful, all that is good, all that is true. Because we love Him, and are amazed by Him, and we want Him to be seen as He is.

God is the one being in all the Earth for whom it is right that He desire the spread of His own glory. God ought to desire the magnification of everything that is good and pure. And He *is* everything that is good and pure! And He should desire that all beings recognize His goodness. He wants people to see what is good and pure, and He is good and pure. And so, we who know Him, we're not asking, "God, let *my* name be glorified. Let *me* be recognized as holy and set apart." I'm not the center. He is!

Love for beauty compels us to want others to see the beautiful. It can be annoying when somebody really loves classical music, or opera, or manga, or nature, or poetry, or their children, or kittens. They see it. They're overwhelmed by the beauty they see. And they want to share it with you. Love for God compels our hearts to want to magnify His glory.

That's why we pray for His name to be recognized as holy. Okay? Who are we praying will recognize His name as holy?

For starters, we're praying for all the people in the world. This is a prayer of evangelism. "O Heavenly Father, let the world see you as you are. Let the world testify to your holiness. Let my neighbors see you. Let my friends see you. Let me society see you. Let them see you and be glad. Hallowed by your name among all the nations!"

Though we're not praying only for the world. This is also a prayer for the health of the Church. "We love You, Heavenly Father. Help us not forget how holy You are and how amazing it is that we can enjoy intimate relationship with You. Help us to stand for Your holiness in our community. Teach our hearts to be in awe of you. Together we pray, 'holy, holy, holy.' Hallowed be Your name in the Church!"

And also for ourselves. "Heavenly Father, open the eyes of my heart. Let me not take You for granted. Help me to hallow Your name in my life, in my worship, to regard You as holy, to be in awe of You. I pray that I would recognize Your name as holy!"

There is a healthy tension in the first two lines of this prayer. God is our Father, and God is holy. When I pray to God, "hallowed be Your name," I am praying for God to overwhelm me with the realization of how powerful, how pure, how just, how magnificent, how dangerous, how mysterious He is. I am so grateful that I can come to Him just as I am, honestly, confidently like a little child taking my father's hand and just walking along. And in this amazing, wonderful familiarity that God has given me, I don't want to forget who He is: holy, holy, pure, and just.

This request for holiness, invites us back to chapter 5. Goodness flows out of the character of God. We are to be perfect as He is perfect, holy as He is holy. And yet somehow, our poverty in spirit, our inability to live up to this standard, does not exclude us from complete acceptance into the family. We get in by grace. We can't live up to God's holiness. But we can pursue His holiness. We are set free from fear of His holiness, so that we can love His holiness; so that we can begin to hunger and thirst after what is true, and what is good, and what is righteous. This starts with a vision of who God is. We meet with God in prayer to see Him. And when we see Him – He is awesome.

So Jesus has taught us to come to God relationally. He is our Father. And He is teaching us to put God at the center of our prayers, because God *is* at the center.

Request #2 *"Your kingdom come."*

Here is the word "kingdom" again. This is an important word for Matthew, and it's helped set up this whole series. In Matthew 1-2, he described for us the birth of the King. Then he summed up the beginning of Jesus' ministry in 4:23 with these words, "Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people."

Then in chapter 5, in the introduction to the Sermon, the beatitudes are framed by the promise of the Kingdom. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3)." And, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:10)."

But even though Jesus is using this Kingdom language, He knows that His words about Kingdom are being greatly misunderstood by His disciples. Matthew is clearly connecting Jesus to Moses. We talked about that in an earlier lesson. As Moses went up on a mountain to receive the covenant that would establish the kingdom of Israel, Jesus is up on the mountain proclaiming a new covenant that will establish a new kingdom. People may get that. But what nobody is prepared to grasp, is how new this kingdom is going to be. It is not only a new kingdom. It is going to be a new kind of kingdom.

The Jews gathered on this mountain expect Messiah to establish Zion on Earth. At the very least, they expect Messiah to establish a greater Israel, throwing off Roman rule, enforcing Jewish law, extending the boundaries of Israel back out to the extent of Solomon's kingdom. The more religious may be expecting a new order of peace with Gentiles streaming in to Mount Zion to learn order, justice, and righteousness from the Jews.

They expect a geopolitical kingdom. A theocracy. An Old Covenant 2.0 with an updated, restored, reinvigorated Israel ruled by God's vassal, the Son of David.

This audience has not yet realized that this New Covenant is going to establish a new kind of kingdom. As Jesus has said in Matthew 9:17, it is going to be a new wineskin. There will be some continuity from the Old Covenant, such as the moral law of loving God and loving your neighbor. But the civil and ceremonial code of the Old Covenant is going to pass away and nothing new is going to be put in its place. Jesus is not setting up a geopolitical Zion. No theocracy. No restoration of government for Israel.

That's what no one present can fathom. The goal of this religious system is not theocracy. What was so integral to Judaism of the Old Covenant, to Islam, to the Roman Catholic Christendom of the Middle Ages, to Calvin's Geneva, to modern views of Christian nationalism, none of that is established in the New Covenant that Jesus is giving us. That cannot be the focus of what Jesus is telling us to pray for when He says, "pray, 'Your Kingdom come!'"

Now, we can wait and wait and wait with this group of disciples on the mountain for Jesus to set up a civil authority. And He never will. He provides no civil law to run a New Covenant Kingdom. No law for an executive branch, a legislative branch, a judicial branch. No generals. No army. This is a new wineskin. This is not Old Covenant 2.0. There are going to be some big changes. And the new concept of Kingdom is one of those big changes.

So, what is the Kingdom we are told to pray for?

That's actually quite a big question with a lot of debate around it. I'm not going to take the time to argue the question. But I am going to tell you what I think.

This prayer for God's Kingdom to come is a prayer for the end of the age. It is an eschatological prayer. "Your Kingdom come" is a prayer for the renewal of all things. We are praying for Revelation 21-22. For all evil to be cast out. For the creation to be renewed. For the adoption of glorified bodies. For the sin nature to be eliminated. For God to reign physically among us. That there would be no more pain, no more suffering, no more death. That we would love God and love our neighbor truly,

heart, mind, soul and strength. That we would continue forever to grow in our knowledge, and enjoyment, and love of God, and that His name would be recognized as holy. “Thy Kingdom come.”

Jesus will say in Matthew 24:14, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.” He will also tell His disciples in Matthew 26:29, right before His death, “But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.” This is a future kingdom that comes after this age is complete. We are preaching a gospel of a hope of something that is to come. It is in that future kingdom where we will walk and talk and drink wine with Jesus.

This is what we are praying for. “Your kingdom come.” The fully-realized Kingdom of God on Earth. That is our Christian hope.

And that is not all I think Jesus is teaching us to pray for. There is an “already/not yet” aspect to New Covenant reality. Matthew tells us in 4:17, “From that time Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” In the last words of this Gospel, Jesus tells His disciples, “I will be with you always even till the end of the age.” We will not drink wine with Jesus until we enter into His physical presence in the heavenly Kingdom. But spiritually our King is with us now in this age.

Jesus has already taken His seat as king on the throne of Heaven. He already reigns. God has given Him dominion over all things. And yet, the world kingdom, both human and demonic, continues in rebellion against Him as the rightful King. So even though He has not come with His heavenly host to defeat the rebellion yet, there is a spiritual sense to Christ’s Kingdom that all of us can participate in now. When we bow to Him and receive Him as Lord, we enter into His Kingdom spiritually. Jesus is not establishing a theocracy - a new geo-political Israel. He is establishing a remnant of believers within every human kingdom, every human society. Through faith in him we are already called, citizens of Heaven. We are ambassadors from Heaven of His plan of reconciliation. Through His presence in us and in our communities we embody the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth in a very real way. Christ makes His presence experienced on Earth in us as individuals and in us corporately as the Church. It’s not in fully realized, but it’s real and it’s now.

When we pray for His Kingdom to come, we are praying for all people to bow before Jesus as King now. And we are praying for His goodness, and His justice, and His love to begin to be realized within human society through those who believe in Him as King, or through the influence of those who believe in Him as King. The Kingdom of Heaven can have a present impact in the kingdoms of the Earth.

This request for Kingdom now in the present is linked to the next request that Jesus teaches us to pray for.

Request #3: *“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”*

God’s Kingdom on Earth is reflected through the obedience of those who bow before Him as King.

This third request also fits very well with an “already/not yet” understanding of Kingdom. The Kingdom is not expressed fully on Earth. The Kingdom is expressed fully in Heaven. We are not there yet. We’re not even close. We cannot fully be there. I mean, how is the will of God expressed in Heaven? Right away, all the way, and with a happy spirit. The angels in Heaven love to do the will of God. They live for the will of God. They eat the will of God. It never crosses their minds to not do the will of God. It is their full and continuous joy.

This is our future hope for ourselves. This is the heavenly Kingdom when it comes on Earth. That heart, mind, soul - we will love to the will of God. That hope cannot be realized until sin and the sin nature are removed. That is the “not yet.” But we can still pray towards that vision, that people will recognize God’s holiness, bow to Him as King and begin to attempt to live in obedience. We can pray for kindness, for peace, for generosity, for purity, for justice, for love.

Again, this is an evangelistic prayer that all peoples would yield to God as Lord, to begin to obey Him on Earth as He is obeyed in Heaven. This is the practical outworking of the prayer for His Kingdom to come now.

We also pray for the will of God to be fully embraced in the Church. “Help us, Lord, to live for your glory! Help us to love well: neighbor, foreigner, enemy. Help us to stand on the rock that is Your Word in all areas of life. Help us to be salt and to be light. Be glorified by us and our obedience to you, heavenly Father.”

We pray that for our church community, and we pray it for ourselves. In fact, this is a tough prayer to pray with integrity. Do I really want God’s will done on Earth as it is in Heaven? What am I saying? When I pray that, what am I actually saying? Do I really want to do God’s will all the way, right away, and with a happy spirit? No matter what He asks me, am I prepared – are you prepared - to fully embrace His will today in your life? Can you pray this prayer with integrity? “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

“Oh, I’m poor in spirit. Thank you Lord that you see me in process; that you are with me. Help me to strive towards joyful obedience. Your will be done in my life, Lord.”

We start our prayer by addressing God as Father. We focus our eyes on Him. We pray for His glory. We pray for the establishment of His Kingdom. We pray for obedience to His will. And then Jesus teaches us to keep going with three kinds of personal request for ourselves.

Request #4: “Give us this day our daily bread.”

In Jesus’ day, for the majority of workers, a day’s pay was for the day’s food. One crop failure could be devastating. “Give us this day our daily bread” means exactly that. “Give us the food we need to live today.”

And it is broader than that. Give us the food, clothing and shelter we need today. Give us the food, the rent we need this month. We’re trusting you for our needs, God.

Carson understands this request as applying very broadly to whatever needs we might have. He writes, “God himself is the ultimate source of every good, whether food, clothing, work, leisure, strength, intelligence, friendship, or whatever.” Prayer for the most basic necessity of bread encourages us to pray also for all the good things that we need to live on. And since Jesus describes Himself as the bread of life and the Holy Spirit as living water, it’s not a big jump to think that this also includes our need for spiritual sustenance. All the good things we need, physical, relational, emotional, spiritual - God is the source.

Carson follows up his statement with a caution, or a rebuke for wealthy believers, writing this, “[God] does not owe us these things. Since all of us have at some time or other gone our own tawdry way, effectively shaking our puny fists in his face and affirming our own independence, he would not be at all unjust were he to withhold his blessings. Our very ingratitude is an insult to Deity; the present thankless generation is an affront to him. We have taken his gifts for granted; and then when they begin to dry up we complain and, call into question the very existence of this beneficent God.”⁵

The request for bread – as I’m praying for bread - implies a right response of gratitude when I have the bread. All we have comes from the sovereignty of God in how He made us, in the opportunities he has given us, in the family or culture we were born into, in the people we need. We did not earn these things from God. We come to Him poor in spirit, not rich. The prayer for bread is a prayer for the most basic of needs and a reminder that all we do have is a gift of grace. The next two requests continue to remind us of our humble, dependent state.

Request #5: “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

The issue here is moral debt, not financial debt. The version translated by Luke helps understand this by using both the Greek word for “sin” and the Greek word for “debt” in the same sentence. This is

⁵ Carson. *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World*. 73.

Luke's version, "And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us (Luke 11:4)."

Prayer for forgiveness is one of the most basic aspects of our prayer life. When we have not recognized God as holy and have not obeyed His will, we know we have let the family, we have let down our heavenly Father. We also know that He has already forgiven us in Jesus. We confess our sin because having a healthy, honest, strong relationship with our Father in Heaven is our top priority. We clear the air. With the same breath we thank Him that we are already forgiven in Jesus, and we ask Him to guide us and empower us to live for Him.

Now, what is this connection Jesus makes between God forgiving us and us forgiving others? Are we forgiven because we deserve to be forgiven? "God, forgive me no more and no less than according to how I have forgiven everyone who has wronged me." Try saying that out loud. "God, forgive me only according to how I have forgiven others!"

I am personally not that forgiving. I mostly feel like I am forgiving. I am pretty forgiving, according to how I see myself. But just this week I was reminded of someone who hurt one of my daughters and my immediate thought was how I would enjoy meeting up with that person and letting them have it. I would put them in their place and let them know how awful their behavior was. I can feel unforgiveness in my gut even as I'm recording this. I did pray through that feeling when it appeared; I gave it up to God in my mind; I said to myself and to God, "I forgive that person." But now, as I record it, my emotions are letting me know that I'm still not caught up with my intentions.

Something else happened while I was praying to God about forgiving that person. Another memory came to mind. This incident is stored in a drawer somewhere in my head. Every once in a while I open a drawer, looking for something else, and see this memory laying there. It is the memory of me saying something pretty self-righteous to a guy that had come to do a training for our team years ago. I felt very justified at the time. But now, whenever this memory shows up, I think how self-centered and unempathetic, unkind I was towards him, towards his situation, and his feelings. I sinned against him.

So I may not be in debt to the guy who said mean things to my daughter, but I am certainly in debt to the guy to whom I said cruel things, and I am so much more in debt to God. I don't want God to forgive me exactly the same way as I have forgiven others. I have forgiven little things, and not consistently. I want God to forgive me for big things, and comprehensively.

The way Jesus frames this request forces us to think about our attitude about forgiveness precisely at the moment that we are asking for forgiveness. This is about our heart posture. Am I just trying to do a business deal with God? I will pray and do good so that He will have to forgive me. Or do I see my sin truthfully in a way that moves me to rethink the way that I see sin in others? We meet with God so that we will see Him, and so that we will see ourselves as He sees us.

Later in Matthew 18 Jesus will tell a parable about a king who forgave an enormous debt. The servant then went and found someone who owed him a much smaller debt. And he threw that fellow in prison. Not being able to forgive others shows that you have not truly repented yourself. Is there anyone of whom you'll say, "I will never forgive that person"? Or we as a culture will never forgive those people? Seriously. Do you know Jesus or do you not know Jesus? Do you understand that you are that person? That person you won't forgive: that's you. This is important enough that Jesus develops it further in verses 14-15.

¹⁴ For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

The point is not that we have to earn our forgiveness by forgiving others. If we think that, then we have not understood chapter 5 and our inability to live up to the actual standard of God's righteousness. Jesus' has made it abundantly clear that we are poor in spirit. We can't achieve a standard. We can't earn anything. No, I think Jesus is calling out play acting. He is calling out hypocrisy. We know how to look repentant. Anyone can go and confess sin. You can be sorry for your

sin. But how do we know that we have truly become poor in spirit, that we have mourned our sin, and that we have really meekly received the grace of God? In other words, how can we know that we have true faith? That we have seen God and we've really yielded to him?

The desire and ability to forgive others is a powerful marker that you've truly confessed your own sin and you have been forgiven. When you feel the truth of how much you have been forgiven, that changes you. There was a similar statement in the beginning in the beatitudes. "Blessed are the merciful for they shall be shown mercy." We are not shown mercy because we earn it by being merciful. Rather, the ones who are merciful are displaying a fruit of having experienced God's mercy.

There is a circular nature to this experience. I have received mercy, and so I extend mercy. In extending mercy, I have a greater understanding of the mercy shown me, so I experience mercy more fully. And that enables me to grant mercy more fully. We never fully arrive in this. We never get to the point of being as merciful as God. But those who show mercy and the ones who forgive are the ones who are, then, able to experience more fully the extent to which they have been forgiven.

When we pray, we are seen by God. Good and bad. We are seen. And we begin to see ourselves. Seeing ourselves, we have the opportunity to repent of our failure, to accept forgiveness, and ask to be filled with His Spirit so that we might press forward in becoming who he is creating us to be, and doing the good works He has given us to do.

This desire to press forward with Him is in the last request.

Request #6: *"And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil."*

This request does not mean that we suspect God of leading us into temptation. It is a humble recognition of our own propensity to be tempted. Our hearts and minds and bodies continue to tend towards evil. We are poor in spirit. We have not arrived. Moral, spiritual success breeds new opportunities to be tempted - success in ministry, family, work, school. We feel that we have arrived, but the sin nature remains. New territory contains new pitfalls.

Jesus will make three requests for His own disciples the night before His arrest. He will pray to God the Father, "Keep them in my name. Keep them from the evil one. Sanctify them in truth, my word is truth (John 17:11, 15, 17)." We are in process of becoming. Spiritual battle is a very real part of this process. There remains evil in us and there is an Evil One outside of us. This is the hard truth of this age. We are not in glory, yet. His Kingdom has not fully come. We need continual growth in the Word of God, the ongoing renewal of our mind. We need protection from the Evil One who would love to wreck our faith. This final request is a prayer for the here and now. It focuses on our humble, dependent state. But it would be a mistake to think that goal is only avoidance of sin.

Carson fills out the request this way, "Lead us, *not* into temptation, but away from it, into righteousness, into situations where, far from being tempted, we will be protected and therefore kept righteous. As the second clause of this petition expresses it, we will then be delivered from the Evil One."⁶

How should we pray, Jesus? This is how we should pray. Not the exact words, but take this as a model and as a guide when you meet with God in the secret place.

Conclusion: Right Reward

We have completed this section, Matthew 6:1-18, the part of the sermon that focuses on Kingdom Piety. Jesus exposed here the hypocritical tendency to use acts of devotion for self-promotion. In this further development of the prayer, He also rejected the use of meaningless repetition as a spiritual formula to force God to give us what we want. Instead, He gives us a model prayer that puts God at the center and aligns us to Him in dependence as sons and daughters who are in process.

⁶ Carson. *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World*. 76.

In each of His three examples on piety, Jesus used the language of reward. And we are now set up to address briefly that language here in the conclusion. The negative reward of the hypocrites was made clear. If you want to be honored, seen, noticed by men, then to the degree that you are honored, seen, noticed by men, that is the reward you get. It is not necessarily an inconsequential reward in the earthly sense. Being honored, seen, noticed may lead to position, may lead to wealth, may lead to respect, may lead to self-confidence. You might successfully create for yourself a pleasant, respectable life in your church and community.

But you have settled for temporal comfort and position when so much more was on offer. A much greater reward is to be had. And this is interesting. Jesus does not tell us that we should perform acts of devotion with no desire for gain or benefit. Jesus speaks of reward from God as a primary motive. Each of the beatitudes also each spoke of a right outcome or a right reward. Those rewards were the Kingdom of Heaven, comfort, inheriting the Earth, satisfaction, receiving mercy, seeing God, being called a son of God. “Rejoice when they persecute you for your reward in heaven is great (Matthew 5:12).”

C. S. Lewis made a very helpful distinction between a right reward and a mercenary reward.⁷ He gave marriage as an example. There is a right reward for marriage; there is also a mercenary reward for marriage. Marriage is intended to provide intimacy, companionship, support, love, joy, complement. It is not wrong to work hard on your relationship with your spouse in the hope of experiencing the right outcome for which marriage was intended by God. The right reward of marriage is deeper intimacy with another person; knowing and being known; companionship. And then everything that flows from that. It is right to enjoy, to desire those rewards as you work on loving your spouse.

Not everyone marries for intimacy and love. A mercenary is someone who does not care about the intended purpose. They’re not fighting because they believe in the cause. They’re fighting for money. It’s for something that doesn’t even have to do with the cause. A mercenary marriage is when someone marries without really caring for the purpose of marriage, for relationship. They’re marrying for money, or family connections, or to have a trophy wife, or a trophy husband. The mercenary may appreciate intimacy, sex, fun, companionship. That’s not why they’re in it. Maybe they need a housekeeper. They need a nanny to care for their children, who will carry on their legacy. They need a source of income or protection. They did not marry for love and intimacy.

The same thing happens in religion. When we engage in acts of devotion to get something out of it that has nothing to do with our relationship to God, then our religious practice has a mercenary motive. Because the whole point of acts of devotion is – devotion. It’s relationship with God. And that’s what hypocrites do. That’s what the nonbelievers who repeat words over and over do. That’s what we do when we use prayer, fasting, Bible study, worship to gain recognition from people or to manipulate God to give us stuff, or to create a certain kind of outcome for us; we are pretending to be devoted to God without actually being devoted to God. Why did Mary pour the perfume out on Jesus’ feet? So she would be remembered? Jesus says, that’s an outcome. Yeah, but it had nothing to do with what Mary was thinking or feeling. She didn’t do it for that at all. She was overcome with how precious Jesus had become to her. He is so valu-- what’s the most valuable thing I own? I’m giving it to Jesus. She loved Jesus. What was her reward for doing that? What is the right reward for an act of devotion? Jesus was her reward. Her relationship with Jesus and the love and the joy that flowed out of that relationship with Jesus. Joy wasn’t even the goal. Joy wasn’t the reward directly, but joy flowed out of relationship.

⁷ C. S. Lewis. *Weight of Glory* in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1980) 26-28.

The right reward for all spiritual acts of piety is God Himself. Relationship with our heavenly Father. When we gain the Kingdom of Heaven, we are gaining God. That's the core essence of the Kingdom. It's the real presence of God in relationship with Him. Love, peace, joy, these fruits of the Spirit are not ends on their own. If we pursue joy by itself, it will slip through our grasp. If we pursue God – relationship with God - we will at times experience incredible joy in our love for Him and in our knowledge of His love for us. Comfort comes from knowing Him because He comforts. Satisfaction comes from pursuing Him because He is the fulfilment of our needs.

It is not wrong to desire the reward of love relationship with God. This is the number one purpose in our life. We should desire this. This is the whole point of religion: to know God and to enjoy Him. He is our reward. We taste His goodness now. We will experience Him with our whole being, forever when His Kingdom comes.

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.