

# True Prayer

Time: 30 minutes

Bible Verses: Matt 6:5-8; 26:37-47

## 【Prayer】

Pray that people may grow together and learn more about prayer.

## 【Introduction – a true How are you】

Good afternoon. Let me start by asking you a question, “when you meet someone at church, what is the first sentence you say?” ... I think it is “Yoh man”, “Hey”, “Hi”, or “How are you?” But do you know there are many different ways of saying “how are you?” For example, someone is walking towards you, and you greet each other: “How are you?” Some don’t even look at you but continue walking. Some look at you and say hi, but also continue walking. Often the reply is quick and simple. “Good”, “Fine” or “I am well”. But if someone tells you he is fine, does that mean he is really fine? ... Not necessarily, it maybe a simple reflex to your question since we do it so many times in our life often we don’t even think before we answer.

This way of saying “hi” is not a true greeting. You are not really asking the person who they going. When people reply, it is formality too, we simply reply for the sake of replying.... Sometimes, after greet each other you will then think in your head, who is this person. If this kind of greeting is superficial, what is a “true” greeting then? I think it is those who stop and look at you, sincerely ask how you have been. These people really want to establish a relationship with you. This kind of greeting is true. A true greeting is an engaging one, you have eye contact, and you truly care for the person you are greeting to.

When you come to church to meet God, or when you pray to God, what kind of greetings do you have? Our prayers can be like those heartless greetings, you pray but you don’t mean it, or you pray but you don’t really want to establish a relationship with God, you pray for the sake of praying, therefore, it is important for Christians to know why and how we should pray. This month we will be sharing how should we pray, and hopefully all of our prayers will be true, rather than superficial prayers. In today’s passage, Jesus is teaching his disciples how to pray. The verses we read are a precursor to the famous Lord’s prayer.

## 1. Pray with the right attitude (6:5-6)

<p>6:5“ And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.</p>
<p>6:6“ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your</p>

Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

First, a true prayer is a prayer with the right attitude. In verses 5-6 Jesus has mentioned the prayer of Pharisees is to win the respect of others, instead of praying from their hearts. Verse 5, when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. They have received their reward in full. Two things I can comment here. First, is Jesus saying public prayer is no good? After all in verse 6 he does mention when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. In Singapore I have heard a group of Christians taking this very literally. We all know Singapore is about 31 degree constantly, and normally it is quite humid. This group will only pray when the doors are shut, even in rooms without air conditioning. Can you imagine how hot it may be? I do respect them for their willingness to obey the word of God, but these verses do not mean we should always pray with doors shut and only in private. After all, Jesus does pray in public too. What Jesus is avoiding is not for prayers to be heard by men, but the intension of wanting the prayer to be heard by man. Prayer is towards God, not to show others how devoted you are towards God. When that is your intention, it means you are not truly devoted to God, and make you a liar, you lied to man, to God, and even to yourself.

Second, the right attitude of prayer is to seek rewards. Sometimes Christians think we should not ask for any rewards when we do things. But here we can see seeking rewards is not wrong, so long as we are seeking for God's reward not man's reward. When you pray in public with the intention for others to praise you, you have already received your full reward from man, but you have no reward from God who you pray to. When we seek to please God, we will be rewarded. The bible didn't say here what kind of reward here, but at least the most important one is for God to be delight in us. Christians seek to please God, and when God is delighted in us, we have the better reward. Therefore it is important when we pray we have the right attitude, seek God rather than seek man. In practice, we should not shape our prayer life around public prayer, but around private prayer. It means that while it is not wrong to pray in public, public prayer should not dominate our prayer life. Perhaps we should pray more in private, to avoid the danger of fake devotion. In our private prayers it should only be yourself and God, and our public prayers should also be more God centered rather than man centered. It is not wrong when you pray in public, we need to be mindful of the people around us, but even public prayers we should have the right intention, and always towards God not men. Don't you feel some people's public prayer is more like preaching rather than praying?

I have heard of a public prayer in a wedding situation, I can't remember the exact words, but the prayer was about 10 minutes, and the content of the prayer is more like preaching. It is something like this, "dear

God, we know marriage is solemn, and marriage is given by God. In the beginning God man and woman, and that is the formation of marriage, therefore we should all respect marriage and its effect. X and Y are getting married today, they should love each other.. blah blah blah.” he prays in this way for 10 minutes. Honestly speaking, I think it is quite inappropriate, and the main issue I see is the prayer doesn't seem to be directed towards God, more like preaching to man. But this is still better than someone whose public prayer seems to be all fine, but in his mind he wants to be praised by men, rather than God.

## 2. Pray with the right understanding (6:7-8)

**6:7** And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. **6:8** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”  
(Matthew 6:5-8, NIV)

Verses 7 and 8 describes another mistake of prayer. Let's look at verses 7 and 8, “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.” ... It says we should not keep on babbling like pagans. Should we then pray like this then? “Dear God, ... Amen.” Is this right? ... If not, then what does Jesus mean? We saw in the bible, that Jesus also repeats his prayer. In Matthew 26:39 it is written, “And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”” Verse 42, “He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”” Verse 44, “So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.” Well, if repetitious prayer is allowed, does it mean we shouldn't pray for too long? ... In Luke 6:12, we see Jesus praying through out the whole night. It says in the bible, “One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.” He must talk a lot with God that night. I don't think Jesus is asking us not to pray the same thing or pray for a long time, but he means praying without articulating is wrong. Verse 8 shows their true intention, they pray as if God doesn't know what they want, therefore they have to repeatedly asking God, they think if they keep on asking, their will will become God's will. It also reminds me of Jonah. Jonah's prayer is a prayer of persuasion. He wants to persuade God with his own life. You pray as if you know better than God what is best for you and others and you repeat your prayers hoping to persuade God to change. Your prayer is lacking a real understanding of who God is, not only he knows what you need, but he is willing to provide what you need.

I think it is like a Buddhist monk praying. I remember prior to the conversion of my mum we had a room in Taiwan dedicated for Buddha worship. In the room there was a cassette player. 7 days a week, 24 hours a day it played the prayer of Buddhist monks. ...(imitating the sound) I am not trying to attack these

monks, since those prayers mean something to them. But to me, that kind of prayer is like praying continuously without much thinking. I think that is the kind of prayer Jesus rejects. It is a prayer without thinking and understanding the will of God.

I can think of a kind of Christian prayer that is easily becoming thoughtless. What is it? ... Yes, it is thanksgiving before meals. I think that is the easiest prayer to be thoughtless. First, we do several thanksgivings a day. There are your breakfast, lunch and dinner, sometimes afternoon tea and supper. Let's say we have three meals a day, then we will be praying over one thousand times in a year. Is it easy to think of new words to pray? Of course not. No matter you are a good Christian or not, it is not easy to remain thoughtful all the time. Second, when you smell the delicious food, your tummy will urge you to pray faster, and it is so easy to palter. I have a method, when we pray not only we thanks God for the meals, we also think about what we can thank God for in our lives. Just like in verse 11 "Give us our daily bread", every material in our life is God's providence. Not only we should rely on God for providing us food, but in all of our material needs we should entrust in him and the most important thing is whether we put our heart into prayer. Eg. Esther's prayer.

Yet there is another danger here. Some people think since God knows what I need, therefore I do not need to pray. Jesus is not promoting fatalism, that everything is fate and there is nothing we can do. The biblical model of prayer ask Christians to be diligent in their prayer life. Pray as if you believe, not pray as if you don't. While believing God's will is higher than ours, at the same time we need to believe that what we are praying is also his will. In that case our prayer will be powerful, even we know he has he sole sovereignty to decide whether to answer our prayer. I have to admit, in practice it is not easy. We are not praying to persuade God, and not praying to have our will above God.

### 3. A prayer of submission (26:37-47)

<sup>NIV</sup> Matthew 26:37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. <sup>38</sup> Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." <sup>39</sup> Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." <sup>40</sup> Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. <sup>41</sup> "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." <sup>42</sup> He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." <sup>43</sup> When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. <sup>44</sup> So he left them and went away once more and

prayed the third time, saying the same thing.<sup>45</sup> Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.<sup>46</sup> Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"<sup>47</sup> While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people.

We have now discussed that a real prayer is a prayer with right attitude and understanding. But I can see in it we also need total obedience to God. It is a total submission, in everything we pray being totally God centered.

There is someone in the bible who always has God centered prayer. Who is he? ... He is Jesus. He knows he will be betrayed by one of his followers; he knows he will carry the sin of the entire human race. He knows he will be tortured and nailed at the cross; he knows he will be rejected by many, even his followers will depart him. Not only he knows it, and in total submission he finally died on the cross. He treats God's will higher than his own. In the passage we have read, Matt 26:39 says, "Going a little further, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Verse 42, "He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." Finally, he drank this cup and died for us on the cross. From Jesus we can see a real prayer is not only thoughtful, but our thoughts should be centered around God. This process may not be easy, but only when you submit your life to God, your heart may have real peace and your prayer will be a real prayer.

### **【Conclusion】**

Did Jesus know God's will? I think he does, then why does he still needs to pray for the possibility of removing the cup. I think first he trusted God's power, he knows God the Father has the ability to remove this cup if necessarily. But his prayer is not a prayer of persuasion, but a prayer of submission. He prays long and repetitively in order for himself to fully submit to the will of God. I sincerely hope. All of our prayers we can learn from Jesus, having the right understanding of God, and the right attitude of prayer, and most of all, a life of submission. I sincerely wish that our prayers are not thoughtless, not doing a show for others to see, and not prayers of persuasion, but truly come from our heart, with the right understanding of who God is, and boldly proclaim God's will be done. Today we will celebrate Lord's supper. Let's pray that God will help us to learn from Jesus. Pray to submit, not pray to persuade.

**Now, let's get real.** Let us pray with real thinking, real actions, real obedience, and real hope. Let us

pray together with the Lord's prayer.

**【Prayer】** Finish with the Lord's prayer.