

THE GOD WHO KNOWS

Introduction

As we saw last week, in [Matthew 6:1-18](#) Jesus speaks about the practical exercise of righteousness. The scribes and Pharisees and others practiced their righteousness publicly, so that they would receive human praise for their good works. They probably did this in a number of areas, but Jesus focused on three: giving, prayer, and fasting.

Last week I taught on the verses that deal with hypocritical giving, praying, and fasting. But Jesus has more to say to us about prayer. This morning we are going to spend our time studying [Matthew 6:7-8](#). And then, before moving on to the Lord's prayer, I'm going to teach a little more broadly on prayer itself. And then we'll look at the Lord's prayer in some detail.

This is what Jesus says to us in [Matthew 6:7-8](#):

Matthew 6:7-8 ESV

“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

TRANSITION: In the previous verses He warned us not to be like Jewish hypocrites; now He warns us not to be like the Gentiles.

THE GENTILES

There wasn't just one kind of Gentile in the first century, nor was there just one kind of Gentile in Israel in the first century. A Gentile is simply a non-Jew, and the world was filled with non-Jews. [Acts 2:9-11](#) gives us a partial list. The Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and Mesopotamians were from the east. Judea is, of course, the heart of Judaism. Cappadocia, Pontus, Phrygia and Pamphylia are in central

Turkey. Egypt, Libya, and Cyrene are in northern Africa. Crete is an island in the Mediterranean; Arabs come from the Sinai Peninsula south of Israel.

Jerusalem was an important trade-center in that region, and people came from all over. They came with their religious practices, and many Jews would have had some idea of how they worshiped.

What's more, the Jews themselves had frequently fallen into idolatry throughout their history; it's the reason they were taken into captivity. Hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, the prophet Elijah confronted Ahab, the wicked king of Israel, because Ahab had abandoned the commandments of Yahweh and followed the Baals. ([First Kings 18:17](#) – contrary to modern opinion, all religions are NOT the same). Elijah virtually commanded Ahab to send the people of Israel to Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who Jezebel, Ahab's wife, had brought to Israel.

1 Kings 18:21–22 ESV

21 And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word. 22 Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 men.

1 Kings 18:23–24 ESV

23 Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it. 24 And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, he is God." And all the people answered, "It is well spoken."

Elijah knew that the gods of the Canaanites were figments of their imagination, so he let them go first.

1 Kings 18:25–26 ESV

25 Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no

fire to it.” 26 And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, “O Baal, answer us!” But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made.

1 Kings 18:27–28 ESV

27 And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, “Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.” 28 And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them.

1 Kings 18:29 ESV

29 And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

Elijah then offered up his bull, saturating the sacrifice and the wood and the stones of the altar with water, even digging a trench around the altar and filling that with water, and then he prayed:

1 Kings 18:36–37 ESV

36 And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. 37 Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.”

1 Kings 18:38 ESV

38 Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

Now, think about these Gentiles, since they provide such a perfect illustration of what Jesus meant.

Isn't it true that the prophets of Baal and Asherah had devoted their lives to Baal?

- They served their god with energy and passion.
- They called out for hours without stopping.

- They were so exhausted that they limped around the altar.
- When mocked by a cynic, they doubled down, cutting themselves with swords and lances until blood poured out of them, and they did this until evening.

There was nothing casual about their faith. In fact, someone might look at them and say, “Well, they are far more passionate than Elijah is; he doesn’t cry out to his God all day long, or cut himself to prove his love for his God! He was done praying almost before he began!”

But notice what else is true about them.

They believed they had to labor to get their god’s attention. Elijah mocks them by saying that maybe Baal is thinking about something else, or in the bathroom, or traveling, or asleep. They may not have believed all of those things, but they did believe that they had to get Baal’s attention.

They also believed they had to convince their god they were serious. They called out, shouted, lurched around the altar for hours, eventually cut themselves so that they gushed blood. They exhausted themselves trying to prove to Baal that they were worthy of his attention.

But all their faith and all their efforts were futile and pointless. There was no voice. No one answered. No one paid attention. That is the true and tragic outcome of false worship: there will never be a voice or an answer, and there will never be anyone to pay attention. That’s because those who worship false gods worship NOTHING. They pray to NOTHING. They serve NOTHING. They don’t appeal to lesser gods or deities; they appeal to NOTHING.

And that’s why Jesus refers to their prayers as “heaping up empty phrases” or “meaningless repetitions,” or more literally, “babbling.” The Gentiles think that their god will hear them because of their many words, but their many words and many deeds are meaningless.

But one man, Elijah, prayed a single time, a prayer of just 40 words. Elijah prayed to Yahweh, who is actually God. He did pray in faith. He did pray with fervency. He

did pray with God's will and God's glory in mind. He didn't need to labor to get Yahweh's attention. He didn't need to convince Yahweh of the need. And he spent less than sixty seconds in prayer.

We know why Baal didn't answer his prophets; Baal is a figment of human imagination, a figment driven and motivated by the power of Satan, but nevertheless an imaginary figure.

And we know why Yahweh answered Elijah. Elijah called out in faith and certainty, for the glory of God and the benefit of God's people. And do you know that we know more about God than Elijah did, because God has revealed Himself fully in Jesus Christ?

TRANSITION: So, why does God hear us when we pray? What does the Lord Jesus tell us? For your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. There are four elements to this statement.

YOUR FATHER

Is God your Father?

He is not your Father if you are not in Christ. We are not naturally born children of God, but children of wrath ([Ephesians 2:3](#)). We become children of God when He adopts us through Jesus Christ.

But knowing God as your Father means more than being saved. We can and should have a theological conviction that in Jesus Christ, God is our Father and we are His adopted children.

But we also need to have the personal conviction, a deep and passionate faith, that God is our Father. Many Christians, myself included at times, are prone to see God as God and Lord and Savior, but don't have a solid understanding that God is our Father, and that we are the objects of His love and tender care.

My daughters are adults and have their own lives, and don't need me very much. But it is so very sweet when, every once in a while, they do need me for something. It might seem small to them, but I am delighted to be their father, and to help them as I am able.

So, the question I ask myself is this: am I convinced that my Heavenly Father is even more delighted when I call upon Him than when my girls call on me? If we are not truly and fully convinced that God is our Father, then we aren't going to call on Him as our Father.

YOUR FATHER KNOWS

Then, Jesus tells us that our Father KNOWS.

He knows everything about everything, a doctrine called omniscience. God never learns, and He never forgets. Before He created anything at all, He knew that you would be sitting where you are today, doing what you are doing, thinking about what you are thinking right now. His knowledge is perfect and exact.

YOUR FATHER KNOWS WHAT YOU NEED

And, Jesus tells us that our Father knows WHAT WE NEED. We don't need to fill Him in on what's going on in our lives. He is never going to be shocked that we are lacking something. He knows that we have that need; in fact, He planned for us to have that need in that moment. I can't help but think about the death of the Rohrer's son-in-law, Eric Johnson, and the needs faced by their daughter, Beth, and her children. We should be praying for them, by all means. But we don't need to inform God about a single thing they need. He knows it all; He knew it all before they themselves knew it.

BEFORE YOU ASK HIM

And Jesus tells us that our Father knows what we need BEFORE WE ASK HIM.

Why add that phrase? Wouldn't it have been enough to say, Your Father knows what you need? Why was it important to add before you ask Him?

At the risk of over simplifying things, it's because we were meant to ask Him for those needs.

We ask God for virtually nothing. Consider the clothes that you are wearing right now, a handful of items. How many of those items of clothing did you specifically ask God to give you? I'm guessing the answer is "none." Yet the Father gave them to you, along with everything else in your life, and He gave them to you without being asked.

I believe that the Father leaves some needs unmet – very, very few, to be honest – so that we would ask Him, as our Father, to give them to us.

BRINGING IT HOME

Are we ready to bring this home?

Our Creator is our God, our Savior, our Lord, and our Father.

- He wants us to worship Him as our God.
- He wants us to trust Him as our Savior.
- He wants us to obey Him as our Lord.
- And He wants us to ask Him as our Father.

Loving our God means all of these: worshiping Him, trusting Him, obeying Him, and asking Him.

None of these are natural to us; any natural worship or trust or obedience or asking was lost when Adam sinned. Once we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we have to be taught to worship, we have to be taught to trust, we have to be taught to obey, and we have to be taught to ask. God IS our Father according to

Scripture; we need to truly know Him and love Him as our Father, and that takes some time to learn.

Our Father knows what we need before we ask

So, why ask if He already knows? Because He's our Father. Because He has left those gifts ungiven so that we would ask Him for them. Because He intends to meet those needs when we ask, although we must remember that He will give those gifts WHEN and HOW it pleases Him.

The Father doesn't make everything an object of prayer; that would be exhausting and discouraging. So He happily, joyfully, and freely gives us the overwhelming majority of what we need, and then causes what is ungiven to rise in our awareness. We come to recognize what we need, and learn to go to Him as our Father. He uses prayer as a means of applying His Word to our lives; prayer is the primary classroom of practical theology.

This is just the starting point for several weeks talking about prayer. I want you to know that I am not a prayer warrior; I am in school on the practice of prayer, and I'm learning as well.

Let's make sure that we have these two starting principles settled in our hearts. God is our Father. He knows what we need before we ask. If you aren't yet settled on these truths, then I urge you to get into the Word and ask the Lord to make them clear to your heart and mind.