

Matthew 6:5-8

Come Away and Be with the Lord

I remember going to an Islamic country for the first time. There were many new cultural experiences for me, but none like being woken up by the Salah or call to prayer. All over the city, five times a day beginning at dawn, the sound of singing would fill the air. If you have never heard the Muslim Call to Prayer, it can catch you off guard. I am used to getting up to chickens, not the Salah. I remember our group complaining because we were not used to the type of singing, and we were also caught between a very different world view. Even though the Salah was hauntingly beautiful, it was filled with Islam, filled with a religion that has no satisfaction and no rest, a religion that is filled with strife and striving to please God.

That experience is contrasted with my trip to Jerusalem. There are mosques in Jerusalem, but Jerusalem has a lot of what my Islamic country doesn't – big, beautiful churches. In Jerusalem, instead of hearing the Muslim Salah I heard church bells ringing. And boy did they ring! I loved hearing them. Church bells ringing always reminds me of both solemnity and celebration. When I heard the bells ringing in Jerusalem I couldn't help but think: It is finished; Jesus has come and won the victory for humanity; all striving is over; the way to rest and peace is accomplished in the ministry of the Son. I think that's why they ring so loud and clear.

One experience was striving, the other was ceasing. One was busy, the other full of rest. Which would you rather have? What's your experience in life? Does your experience match the peace that Christ has accomplished or are you filled with distraction and unrest? In the midst of all of our striving, Jesus, our peace, calls us to come away and pray.

READ TEXT

We have been talking about prayer here at Oxford for a few weeks and have seen that prayer is a conversation with God; prayer is our opportunity to express the fellowship that has been granted to us by setting our hearts to seek his face. And today, we get to look at an aspect of prayer – the time when we are alone with God. We call that time all sorts of things in church talk, quiet time, devotion time, but today I want us to explore the importance of our coming away and being with the Lord.

Let's look at that text again. *Go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.* Do you see what our Lord is calling us to? Jesus is calling us to a deep life of active faith. In contrast to the hypocrite whose confidence is themselves, Jesus calls his followers

to pray to the unseen God. Do you see the faith? For some who may be new to church, prayer can feel a bit awkward. Maybe some never get over the awkwardness so you don't take what Jesus says here seriously.

Think about how counter intuitive prayer can seem. "You mean to tell me that if I have received bad news I am to go into a private space where no one is watching and pray to a God that I can't see, who may or may not give me a direct answer?" "You want me to pray about it?" That's right. Do you see how prayer is an activity filled with faith?

I remember as a boy having a dream. An old man was in his house on the floor on his knees by his bed praying when the door suddenly flew open and the Devil himself entered the room. The Devil saw the man praying and said, "Do you really think praying will do any good?" The man didn't rise from his knees but said, "Devil if my prayer has no effect, then why are you here fighting so hard against me?" The Devil left in a rage.

As Agathon said, "Prayer is warfare to the last breath." This is why Paul said in Ephesians 6, when he was talking about the armor of God and spiritual warfare, "*and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...* (Ephesians 6:17-18, ESV). In the midst of this life filled with strife, Jesus calls us to pray. Jesus is calling our hearts to tangibly express our longing for him, and the way that we express our desire for him is for us to come away and set our hearts to seek his face by bowing our knees and saying *Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven....*

Our Lord wants us to see the beauty of coming away and being with the Him. All of the Christian life is characterized by realizing the presence of the Lord. Think about the heart of our confession: *The Word became flesh and dwelt (pitched his tent) among us*. When we were incapable of going to his transcendence he brought heaven down to us by him transcending his own transcendence (Mind blowing! Beautiful! Good!) This is the heart of our confession, we know the good of this, but if we are honest there are days where we don't feel the closeness of his presence. Has God even felt distant to you? I think that has more to do with us than him, nevertheless, we live in this reality where we have to take active steps to remind ourselves, to center ourselves, of the indisputable reality of the invisible God.

Look at this prayer the Lord sets before us for just a moment. Do you see how it comes to us? It is not in isolation, it doesn't call for a neglect of the trouble that we face, it faces our storm and gives us an anchor, a sail that will never be torn. You are either facing the problems listed in this prayer or you will face them. But in the

midst of this world filled with so much uncertainty, Jesus calls us come away and be with the Lord, Jesus calls us to pray.

I want to give you two beautiful truths about this calling to come away and be with the Lord:

1. God Desires Us to Desire Him

Don't ever get over the absolute privilege of prayer and what prayer expresses. Prayer is our opportunity to express a deep longing to be with the Lord – to have his ways fill us and everyone and everything around us. We are not praying for our will to be done but his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Think of creation. The first words of the Bible are what? *In the beginning God* did something, *created*. This tells us a great deal. God is the God of revelation, the God who reveals himself. This is important. If God did not reveal himself we would be left looking at the sky tomorrow at the total eclipse and thinking that a monster was eating the sun. Ancients used to think that. Apart from God's revelation, we could think that these planets just magically appeared with no order, no rhyme, no purpose. Some modern sophisticates believe that. We are left in a better position. We know, as one artist said, "Who taught the sun where to stand in the morning, the one who told the ocean you can only come this far, who told the moon where to hide till evening, whose words alone can catch a falling star." (Nicole C. Mullins, *I Know My Redeemed Lives*)

And what we know about God's good creation is that he made a beautiful paradise where man could walk with God in the cool of the day. He could have made himself unknowable, but he didn't. God chose to create a world and us with the capacity to relate with him. How do we know that? God told us in his book, the Bible.

He first revealed himself in creation and then through new creation. You know the story of the Bible. Walking with God was interrupted by Mankind's turning away from God. But still that didn't stop God from setting forth a plan to redeem his creation. So, he called a people to himself out of the darkness to be lights to the world, (Abraham and the Jews) and from those people One would come who would bring order back to a world filled with chaos. *And when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.* (Galatians 4:4-5, ESV)

The ministry of the Son is a ministry of revelation (no one knows the Father except the Son and whoever knows the Son knows the Father). The ministry of the Son is a ministry of new creation. Everything that he does he

does to bring us into fellowship with God. He could have existed for all eternity without feeling our hurt, hunger, no reason for him to suffer, but he chose to do it all.

Why? He loves us.

This Jesus is calling us to come away and be with him. How will we respond? When will we respond? How could we not respond?

Let's think about this first point a little more. *God Desires Us to Desire Him*. Does that sound strange to you? How could anyone not desire God? He is all-wise, all-consuming, all-loving, full of compassion, the highest attainable thought, even greater than any of our greatest imaginings. He created us for only one purpose – to enjoy him forever. Enjoying his infinite majesty is our utmost pleasure. He is love, full of patience, full of justice, and he calls us into fellowship with eternity through the self-sending of the Son who took on flesh in order to redeem our flesh by becoming sin and dealing with what separated us from him by being nailed to a cross. He has been raised from the dead and now stands forever making intercessions for us - he who calls us to pray is himself praying for us.

Who could not desire God? He is the healing for every sorrow; the cure for every disease; the peace for hate and racism; the justice for every injustice; the life in the valley of the shadow of death; the light in the midst of darkness; hope in the midst of hopelessness; and he calls we who were sick with sin, wrestling with restlessness, to be with him. Who wouldn't desire God?

But our experience is that we, those who love him, have to discipline ourselves to enjoy fellowship with him. Is that just my experience, or is anyone else with me? We call these things spiritual disciplines. Prayer is warfare, battle to the final breath. By calling us to pray, Jesus let's us in on his desire. Jesus is desiring us to desire him. Not out of necessity but out of love. He can be God without us, but he chooses to love us. Amazing!

Look at the way he calls us to pray. *Go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret*. Number 2:

2. God Calls Us to Store Up Treasure

Are you a collector of treasure? This word for room is *ταμείον* (*tameion*) and it refers to a secret chamber where treasure is kept. Jesus is calling us into the treasury and by calling us away he is revealing much about the way he wants us to view this world and ourselves.

Why do we pray? One reason is because of where we are and where he is. Where are we? Between two worlds – between one that is passing away and another that is coming. We are pilgrims in a foreign land whose citizenship is in heaven. *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...* (Philippians 3:20, ESV). I wonder if this is the way we view things, or have we forgotten that we are pilgrims passing through, awaiting a better land that is coming, a land like Jeremiah mentions:

And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:34, ESV)

Do you see what our Lord is doing by calling us to pray? He is calling us to develop a Christian or Christ-centered way of thinking that embraces these faith-filled realities. Christ is calling us to come away and go to into our rooms, and shut the door, and get the right perspective on things. We live by faith and not by sight. So, the way that we will view the world will be through the window of our treasury. By calling us to our rooms to pray, Christ is calling us to have the right perspective on things.

Often, we need those times of quiet so that we can remind our hearts and souls of the truth of God. Do you have time alone with God? We don't like quiet. We call it awkward silence. But being alone is all about character development. If you are like some, the most anxious times can be those times when you are all alone. Your mind is racing. It is amazing what happens to me when I kneel down to pray, suddenly I think of things I have not thought of in years, and remember things that I forgot last week! Why is that? I think Jesus offers us a solution.

Look at what Jesus is calling us to do. He is calling us to come away but not calling us to empty our minds. He is calling us to go to a specific place – our treasure room. Could it be that the reason we are distracted when we pray is because we are setting our hearts on trinkets instead of treasures? Could it be that we are carrying too much of ourselves in our praying instead of fellowshiping with God in worship. Are we praying *Thy will be done* or *My will be done*? How can you know the difference? What is in your treasury? How do you pray? What consumes your prayer life? When's the last time you prayed to love God more? The last time you prayed for your friend's sickness but that through the sickness God would draw them to himself? We can either reach the heights of heaven when we pray or be stuck on earth. I'd rather reach the heights of heaven. How can you? Pray the way Jesus teaches, go into your treasury. What's my treasury you might ask. Scripture.

The closest verse by verse, book by book, exposition that the great English Baptist Preacher, C.H. Spurgeon ever wrote was on the Psalms. He titled his multi-volume work, *The Treasury of David*. You know why he called it that? He read the Psalms. Have you? Let's read just a few:

- Psalm 19:7-11

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the
honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward. (ESV)

- Psalm 84:10-12

For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the LORD God is a sun
and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does
he withhold from those who walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts,
blessed is the one who trusts in you! (ESV)

- Psalm 67

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to
shine upon us, Selah
that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among
all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples
praise you!

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the
peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Selah

Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise
you!

The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, shall bless us.
God shall bless us; let all the ends of the earth fear him! (ESV)

Or how about this one:

- Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my
life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (ESV)

What is in your treasury? Are your prayers consumed with self or the sovereign Lord? One way of praying is praying from a room full of treasure, the other way is praying in a room full of trinkets. Jesus is calling us to come away from the world and enter our rooms filled with the treasure that he offers and pray. That is why there is reward, *HE* is our reward.

By calling us to pray this way Jesus is telling us the secret to praying. It is not so much about our demands and our wish lists as it is about us seeing the world through the window of our treasury, for us to come away and be with the Lord, and that's something that is worth looking forward to doing. This way of praying takes work, you have to be able to recognize the voice of God when you are having a conversation with him. How can you recognize his voice? *Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.* And what does the Bible tell us? It tells us that we have a Father who sees in secret when we pray and stands ready to reward those who seek him, but we will have to save that for next week.

Hopefully prayer for you is more delight than duty, more organic than mechanic. This method may be new for you, that's okay, Jesus has come to show us the way, and more than just show us the way, he himself is the way.