Matthew
When God Doesn't Listen
Matthew 6:5-8
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We are studying Matthew, chapter 6, verses 1 through 18, and I've noted for you that Jesus begins this passage with the "General Principle" in verse 1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." Jesus says, "Be on guard against doing legitimate spiritual activities to be noticed by others," (Paraphrase). We have to beware of the deadly danger of hypocrisy. Now, Jesus follows that general principle in verse 1 with "Three Specific Examples." Notice in verse 2, "When you give," we've looked at that already; "When you pray," verse 5; and then in verse 15, "When you fast."

Now today, we come to Jesus' second example that has to do with our praying. Now, let me give you the flow of thought in this paragraph. You will notice in verses 5 and 6, Jesus deals with praying with hypocrisy, so that's on point for what we've already seen. But then in verses 7 and 8, He takes a slight detour to address another wrong way to pray, and that has to do with meaningless repetition. And then in verses 9 to 15, He gives us a pattern for the right kind of prayer that isn't meaningless repetition, and that's in what we call "The Lord's Prayer." Now today, I want us to study just verses 5 through 8, and yes, we are going to cover all four of those verses today. Let's read them together. Matthew, chapter 6, verse 5:

> "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. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what

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> is done in secret will reward you. 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. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Jesus here identifies and warns us to avoid "Two Wrong Motives for Praying," two wrong motives for praying. He ascribes the first of those, in verses 5 and 6, to "The Hypocrites," and the second he ascribes to "The Gentiles or The Pagans" in verses 7 and 8. With both of these wrong motives, Jesus first unmasks "The Wrong Motive Itself," and then He lays out "The Remedy or The Solution to Correct It." Let's look at them together.

The first wrong motive for praying is in verses 5 and 6; it's "When We Pray to Gain a Reputation with Others," when we pray to gain a reputation with others. Look at verse 5, "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." Now before we learn what that means, I want us first to make sure we know "What Jesus Does Not Mean" here. He does not mean, first of all, that "It is wrong to pray standing." Some pick on that word and think there's some issue with that. He's not taking issue with a specific posture in prayer. We know that because Scripture actually records several different postures in prayer. Jesus often prayed standing, and He expected us too as well. Mark 11.25, "Whenever you stand praying." David prayed sitting, 2 Samuel 7:18, "Then David the king went in and sat before the LORD, and he said, 'Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house that you have brought me this far?'" Often in Scripture, people pray kneeling. Acts 21:5, "After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another." And to show humility and dependence on God, sometimes people even prostrated themselves on the ground before God, like Jesus in Gethsemane in

Matthew 26:39. So, Jesus isn't forbidding standing any more than He forbids any other posture in prayer.

Secondly, Jesus doesn't mean that “It is wrong to pray in public.” In the Old Testament, there are many prayers that are offered publicly, like Solomon's prayer of dedication for the Temple in 2 Chronicles, chapter 6, verses 14-41; that is just one example. Jesus often prayed publicly; there are many examples in the Gospels (Matt. 11:25; 14:19; 26:39, 42; Luke 11:1). The Apostles and the early church engaged in public prayers. You can see them throughout the book of Acts, but for example; Acts 1:24; Acts 3:1; Acts 4:24-31, and so forth. In addition to all of that, the New Testament commands that when the church gathers, we are to pray publicly in corporate worship, 1 Timothy 2, verses 1ff. And so, Jesus does not mean that it's wrong to pray standing or that it's wrong to pray publicly.

So then let's consider “What Jesus Does Mean.” He's telling us to “Beware the Wrong Motive for Prayer.” Now, notice in verse 5, first of all, Jesus assumes that we will pray, “When you pray.” This is just like in verse 2, where the way it's worded in the original language implies, ‘this is going to happen, I'm expecting this.’ In addition, here in verse 5, the pronoun ‘you’ in Greek is plural. So we could paraphrase it in a sort of southern way by saying, “When you all pray,” that's what Jesus is saying, “And I'm assuming you will.” In the first century, for the Jewish people and for Jesus' disciples, there were set times for prayer every day. If you lived in Jerusalem or were in Jerusalem visiting, you went to the temple at the time of the morning sacrifice as well as at the time of the mid-afternoon sacrifice in order to pray. If you were outside Jerusalem, there were morning and noon and evening prayers. Psalm 55, verse 17, “Evening and morning and at noon...and He will hear my voice.” Daniel, even in Babylon, practiced this pattern. In Daniel, chapter 6, verse 10, “and he (Daniel) continued kneeling on his

knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously." So Jesus, then, expected His disciples, and He expects us, to pray regularly. We know He expects us to pray daily, even in the Lord's Prayer that we are going to study together. Remember what we're taught to pray there? "Give us (What?) this day our daily bread." That implies that prayer is a part of the believer's everyday routine.

Now, notice what Jesus says about when we pray, verse 5, "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites." As we've already learned in this chapter, 'hypocrite' is actually a Greek word that has been transliterated letter for letter into English. In early secular Greek, this word was used of actors, Greek actors on the Greek stage who wore masks to help the audience identify the character they were playing, from the very back of those massive Greek amphitheaters. And so, by the time you come to the first century, this word had lost the idea of 'actor' in the good sense, and it came to describe in a bad sense 'anyone who wears a mask and plays a part.' So how do such people approach prayer? Verse 5, "for they love to stand and pray." If that's all we had, that would sound pretty good, right? "They love to stand and pray." John Stott writes"

> What He says of the hypocrites sounds fine at first, they love to pray; but unfortunately, it is not prayer which they love, nor the God they are supposed to be praying to. No, they love themselves and the opportunity which public praying gives them to parade themselves.

Because notice how Jesus continues in verse 5, "for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues." Now by the time of the first century, synagogues were a stable part of Jewish life in first-century Palestine as well as across the world. But in Palestine, the synagogues really

served two purposes. During the week, they were like a community center. All kinds of activities happened there. But they were especially used on Saturday on the Jewish Sabbath as a place of worship. And public prayers were offered there weekly. In a typical synagogue service in the first century, the ruler of the synagogue would have chosen a male member of the congregation at the appropriate time to come up and stand near the Ark, where the scrolls of the Old Testament were kept, and from there, to lead the congregation in prayer. Jesus says here, the hypocrites, the scribes and Pharisees, they loved it when they were chosen to pray publicly. And they prayed, not so God heard, but so that others heard and were impressed with them.

Notice verse 5 says, the hypocrites of the first century also loved to pray "on the street corners." Now, this Greek word for 'street' is different than that back in verse 2 where it's 'the narrow streets' where the poor lived. This Greek word speaks of 'a broad, spacious street, a main thoroughfare.' We know that on the days designated for public fasts, and possibly even every day at the time of the afternoon sacrifice, a trumpet sounded in Jerusalem as the call to prayer. Wherever you were, you were supposed to stop that moment and pray. That sounds innocent enough, right? But the hypocrites, the scribes and Pharisees, actually planned their schedule so that they would arrive at the most public places at the time of the call to prayer. Not only on the thoroughfares but notice Jesus says at "the street corners." So they wanted to be on the busiest street and at a corner where they could be seen from all four directions. They wanted the largest stage possible. *The Talmud*, the Jewish *Talmud* says, "That men would sometimes stand in a public place appearing to pray for up to three hours." Now, again, let me remind you, Jesus is only forbidding public prayer when your motive is to be seen by others and thought to be spiritual. Augustine puts it this way, "It is not the being seen of men that is wrong but doing these things for the purpose of being seen." It's like what Jesus says in chapter 23, verse 14,

“Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites because you...for a pretense you make long prayers.” It wasn't their long prayers; it was that it was an act. It was put on not for God, but for those around them.

The clearest and most egregious example of this kind of thing that I ever personally encountered was when I was in seminary. Near where I went to school, there was a Western Sizzlin' Steakhouse, and it was very popular with the male students, as you might imagine. Now, I wasn't there when this event happened, but a friend of mine was and reported it to me firsthand, and I heard about it from others as well. This actually happened. There was a man who went through the salad bar there at Western Sizzlin' Steakhouse, I'm making some of you hungry already, and he got this massive salad. He came back to his table, and he set the plate with his salad there on the table, then he pulled out his chair and stood on his chair in the middle of the restaurant and loudly offered his prayer of thanks so that everybody in the restaurant could hear him. Now, I'm not sure, but I think that may be violating what Jesus is teaching here. You know, we can laugh at that guy because most of us have never been tempted to do that. You are not going to leave here and at lunch, go to a restaurant, pull out your chair and stand on your chair and pray as loudly as you can so everyone can hear you, at least I hope you won't. And if you do, don't tell anybody you're from Countryside.

Now, we laugh at that guy, but let's be honest, hypocritical prayers also take much more subtle forms that we can all be tempted by. Lloyd-Jones says, “It is possible for a person to pray in secret in such a way that everybody knows he is praying in secret because he gives the impression that, by spending so much time there, he is a great man of prayer.” So here are some ways that we've all been tempted to do what our Lord forbids here. As they like to say, “I am

about to stop preaching, and I'm going to go to meddling," alright? Here we go, "Ways that we Pray Hypocritically:"

1. "Praying publicly without truly speaking to God from your heart." You ever done that? Of course you have and so have I. That is a universal temptation where we're just speaking, but we're not truly addressing our hearts to God. James Montgomery Boice had some really remarkable words to say about this. He said:

    > I believe that not one prayer of a hundred (not one of a hundred) of those that fill our churches on a Sunday morning is actually made to Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are made to men or to the praying one himself, and that includes the prayers of preachers as well as those of the members of the congregation.

    I'm afraid he's exactly right. We have to address God from our hearts. When we pray, you have to be thinking of God and not of the people around you or of yourself.

2. "Praying longer to seem more spiritual."
3. "Praying more in public than in private." Why would we do that? It's for pretense, it's for show, to seem spiritual.
4. "Talking about how much you pray." You know, there are some people who, just all the time, are talking about what great prayer warriors they are.
5. "Telling others that you'll pray for them with no intention to do so." But why is that hypocritical? Because why did you tell them you were going to pray for them? Because that sounds spiritual, and you want them to think you are spiritual, but you don't have any plan to do it. So that's right out of Matthew 6.

6. “Using words or phrases to impress others.” Do you use different language when you pray with others than you pray when you pray to the Lord out of your own heart? There is no prayer language, charismatic or otherwise. Speak from your heart to the Lord and do it whether you're praying publicly or privately.
7. “Orchestrating your schedule to be seen praying,” like those in Jesus' message here. At the Christian college I attended, there were many genuine, spiritually-minded students. But it was also hilarious and sad to see how, overtly at times, some disobeyed this command. Some would actually get up early in the morning, at 5 A.M., and they would pray either sitting or kneeling in the hallway, the public hallway, so that anybody else going down that hallway saw them and saw how deeply spiritual they were to get up so early and to pray. Some would announce to their roommates, “Listen, if anybody needs me, I'm going to be in the prayer room for the next two hours. You can find me there.”

Listen, all of us have been tempted in these very same ways, but do you hear what Jesus is saying? When we think more about people than about God when we pray, then we are like the hypocrites. And what's the result? Notice verse 5, “Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.” They already got what they really wanted, so Jesus says they should expect nothing from God. Philip Ryken says, “By the time the hypocrite says, ‘Amen,’ he has already received everything that he will ever get for his prayers.” Beware of praying to gain a reputation with others, that is a wrong motive.

So, let's consider then, “How to Apply the Lord's Solution for That Kind of Hypocrisy.” How do we, what do we do about that? How do we keep from praying with this motive? Well, Jesus tells us how in verse 6. Now, here again, Jesus switches back to the singular pronoun in Greek, ‘you’ as an individual. So He's talking to you, Christian, individually, “But you, when you pray, go

into your inner room." The point, obviously, is if circumstances demand, it's okay to pray publicly, we've already seen that, but whenever you can, pray privately. The Greek word for 'inner room' here can refer to 'any interior room in a house,' but it was often used of the 'inner storeroom where valuables were kept.' You see, in the first century, homes were not very secure. The poorest homes would only have like a piece of fabric or animal skin hanging over the exterior door. But many of the homes had real doors, real exterior doors. But even then, the home wasn't always secure. And so there was a small room away from the exterior, usually in the center of the house, that had a lockable door, and that's where the valuables of the household were often kept. It was the most private room in a first century house. Jesus says we are to go into an inner room like that to pray. Why? So that we can't be seen by those outside the household. But notice He adds, go in that room, verse 6, "and close your door." In other words, "Don't even let those in your house see you."

Now don't misunderstand here. Jesus isn't forbidding praying in other rooms, your den or your kitchen or wherever, or in other private places. I mean, think about it. He Himself often went onto a mountain or into the wilderness to pray. Matthew 14:23, "After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone." Jesus is not even saying that you can never pray where another member of your family or another believer might see you. We know that because, again, think of the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus took the three with Him a little further, said, "You stay here, you pray with me, I'm going to go over there." They could see Him; they knew what He was doing. His main point comes in the rest of what He says. Notice verse 6, "and pray," that is a command from Christ to us to pray, "and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you."

Now I love what this verse says about our God. Notice it says, “Your Father,” Christian, “is in secret.” There is nowhere you can go that God isn't there. Psalm 139:7, right? “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your Spirit?” Matthew 6:6, “And your Father who sees *what is done* in secret,” both sees you in secret and he hears you in secret. It's like Psalm 34:15, “The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and His ears are open to their cry.” He sees and He hears. So Jesus says, “Pray to your Father.” Don't miss this–Jesus' point is not about where, but to whom you pray, because prayer is a conversation with God.

Now listen closely to this, this is very important, “Wherever you are, if you're not talking to God, you're not praying and He is not listening.” Let me say that again, “Wherever you are, if you're not talking to God, you're not praying and He's not listening.” Filson says, “Prayer does not exist where man's aim is self-promotion. Such parade is not prayer to God, but self-worship!” But here's the good news, beloved. Listen carefully to this other side of it, “When you really talk to God from your heart without trying to impress the people around you, your God truly hears you!” Jesus promises this. Notice what he says in verse 6, “Your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.” Now, that doesn't mean that you're always going to get everything you pray for. That's not the promise. It means that God will hear you, and He will give you in response to that request exactly what you need.

So, Jesus here, wants us to examine our prayers to see if they've been tainted by hypocrisy. So let me ask you some questions that I've had to ask my own soul this week. “Do you enjoy spending time in secret prayer with God? Do you?” Or “Do you pray more in public than you do in private?” “When you pray publicly, are you trying to impress the people around you?” “What do you think about when you're praying publicly?” “Are you thinking about speaking to your Father or are you thinking about speaking to the people around you?” If you're tempted to pray

to gain a reputation with others, Jesus has a very simple solution–"Get away from other people altogether so that you will really talk to God." That's what He says. The first wrong motive is "When We Pray to Gain a Reputation with Others."

There's a second wrong motive Jesus points out here in verses 7 and 8. It's "When We Pray to Gain Merit with God." Notice "Our Lord's Explanation" of this wrong motive in verse 7, "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition." The Greek word for 'meaningless repetition' means 'to speak without thinking, to babble.' Jesus says, "Listen, don't babble on; don't keep speaking without thinking." Now this doesn't mean you can't pray long prayers. Obviously, Jesus did in at least two occasions, He prayed through the entire night. Nor does this mean that you can't say the same thing to God more than once. Jesus did that as well. Matthew, chapter 26, verse 44, in the Garden of Gethsemane, "And He left them again...and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more," and in context for about an hour. So He is not saying you can't pray long prayers. He's not saying you can't repeat yourself in prayer; He did that.

The rest of verse 7 clarifies His real point. Look at it, "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do." That's the kind of thing He is talking about. And the moment He said that, Jesus' disciples could think of many examples, there are examples in the Old Testament. You remember in 1 Kings 18:26, the prophets of Baal called on the name of Baal from morning until noon and here was their prayer, "O Baal, answer us, O Baal answer us," etc., etc., etc. But there was no voice and no one answered. Even in the pagan religions of the first century, this was still very much true. You have the example of a kind in Acts 19:34, where, you remember, the Ephesians chanted for two hours, "Great is Artemis (Diana) of the Ephesians!"

But here, Jesus is referring in our text to the kind of meaningless repetition that was involved in pagan prayers. Now, meaningless repetition is still very much in style today. It can be a temptation among true Christians, that's why Jesus warns us here, but it's especially prevalent in false religions. For example, take the Tibetan Buddhists, they have adopted modern technology to improve their traditional prayer wheels. They had the idea that if you fixed a prayer to a prayer wheel, you put it in the wind somewhere on the mountainside, every time the wind blew that wheel around a full turn, that was as if you had made that prayer. And so, they've adopted modern technology now, and they've put billions of prayers on nanofilm. They attach that to the prayer wheel and then put that where the wind blows, and in their minds, every time that wheel turns one revolution, it's as if they've prayed a billion prayers! Why does that matter? Because they think they are going to be heard.

The Roman Catholic Church's rosary perfectly embodies this idea of meaningless repetition. The rosary is actually in honor of the Virgin Mary, and it consists of a set number of prayers. Those of you with a Catholic background, you understand this. Those of you who don't, let me tell you what a rosary is. First of all, there are “Introductory Prayers” that consists of one of the Apostles’ Creeds, one “Our Father” or “The Lord's Prayer,” three “Hail Mary’s,” and one “Glory Be.” That's just the introduction. Then comes the core of the rosary, which are called “The decades.” There are 15 decades in a full rosary, which takes about 45 minutes to say. And each of the 15 decades consists of ten “Hail Mary’s” bracketed between an “Our Father” and a “Glory Be.” That means the Catholic faithful in one full 45-minute rosary say more than 150 “Hail Mary’s,” 16 “Lord's Prayers,” and 16 “Glory Be's.” That is mindless repetition.

Now why? Why do people pray with mindless, meaningless repetition? Look at what Jesus says in verse 7, “For they suppose (They have this mistaken idea, Jesus says.) that they will be heard

for their many words." They think the sheer volume of words is going to make God more likely to hear them. What is really going on there? At its heart, they believe that a lot of words gains merit with God, "God's going to hear me. He's going to respond better if I take more time with this and say it more often." So Christian, let me ask you, "Do you think that there's anything that you do in prayer that makes God more likely to hear you? Your posture? The words or phrases that you use? The length of your prayers?" Listen, there's nothing wrong with being in a respectful posture. There's nothing wrong with choosing your words carefully before God. There's nothing wrong with praying a long time. But if you think your posture or your words or the length of your prayers makes God more likely to hear you, you have wildly misunderstood the reason God responds. He responds because you're in His Son, you're in Christ, and He responds because it comes from your heart. That's what moves the heart of God.

John Chrysostom, one of the early expositors of the Christian church, said, "Whether or not our prayer is heard depends not on the number of words, but on the fervor of our souls. Is it sincere? Does it matter to us?" Thomas Brooks, the English Puritan, puts it really well. He says this:

> God looks not at the elegancy of your prayers to see how neat they are, nor yet at the geometry of your prayers to see how long they are, nor yet at the arithmetic of your prayers to see how many they are, nor yet at the music of your prayers, nor yet at the sweetness of your voice, nor yet at the logic of your prayers. But at the sincerity of your prayers, how hearty they are (Meaning how full of your own heart they are. And then he finishes with this.) There is no prayer acknowledged, approved, accepted, recorded, or rewarded by God, but that wherein the heart is sincerely and wholly or completely.

That's what God hears. Brooks is right. Ultimately, God doesn't care about your words, He cares about your heart. That's why one of the most beautiful definitions, biblical definitions of prayer, comes in Psalm 62:8, where the psalmist says, “Trust in Him (the LORD) at all times, O people (And what?); pour out your heart before Him.” That's prayer; it's the pouring out of your heart before God.

So, in light of that explanation of the wrong motive, let's consider in verse 8, “Our Lord's Exhortation.” How do we respond? Verse 8 says, “So do not be like them.” How? How can we keep from being like them? By reminding ourselves what is true about God. “For (Because) your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” Now thoughtless repetition in prayer is intended to do one of two things. One, it's intended to overcome God's reluctance or indifference to you. Or two, to give God information He doesn't have. You don't need to overcome God's indifference or reluctance because Jesus says He is already “your Father” and He cares about you. Philip Brooks says, “Prayer is not conquering God's reluctance, but taking hold of God's willingness.” I love that. He's already accepted us because of Christ's merit. We can never merit anything from Him, including a response to our prayers. And you don't need to provide God with more information about what you need because He already knows. Psalm 38:9, “Lord, all my desire is before You; and my sighing is not hidden from You.” Listen, He knows what you need, and He's already promised to supply it. Look at Matthew, chapter 6, verse 32, “for the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things,” and He's been talking about clothing and what to eat, all that sort of thing. “The Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.” He knows what it takes to live in the world. He knows what you need. “But (you) seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added.” That's a divine passive; He will add all these things to you as He

sees you need them. He's already promised. So, you can avoid meaningless repetition in some ill-conceived effort to gain merit with God by reminding yourself that He is your Father, and that He already knows what you need. He just wants you to come lovingly to Him, acknowledge your dependence on Him by sincerely asking Him for what you need. D.A. Carson writes, “In sum, Jesus wants to teach us that praying, to be a genuine act of righteousness, must be without ostentation (or show), directed to the Father and not to men, primarily private and devoid of the delusion that God can be manipulated by empty wordiness.” As we pray, Jesus says our motive can never be to gain a reputation with people or to gain merit with God.

Now, as soon as I say that, that raises a huge question, and that is, “Why pray at all?” Have you ever asked yourself that question as someone who believes in the sovereignty of God? “Why pray at all?” If it doesn't gain merit, if it doesn't give Him information, if He's already decided in His eternal decree whatsoever is going to come to pass, why pray? Well it's crucial to understand that prayer doesn't change God. God is immutable, unchangeable. His plan was settled in eternity past, so prayer doesn't change God in that sense. Prayer just gives you a chance to express your absolute dependence upon God for everything. 1 Peter 5:7, “Casting all of your anxiety (cares) on Him, because (for) He cares for you.”

I think a beautiful picture of prayer is given to us by the English Puritan, Richard Baxter. He said, “Prayer is like fishing from a boat and casting your line up onto the shore. And as you draw that line toward you, it feels like you're drawing the bank to yourself. But in reality, you're drawing your boat to the bank.” That's what prayer does; it pulls our little boat toward God and His purposes and His plans. Prayer doesn't change things, prayer changes us. It brings us in line with God. Now don't misunderstand, that doesn't mean God doesn't answer prayer, He does.

So that raises a second question, “How does prayer and God's answer to my prayers fit with God's eternal, sovereign purpose and plan? How do those two mesh?” Here's the key, God not only determined the ends of everything He would accomplish in eternity past, but He also determined the means by which He would accomplish those ends. And answering our prayers is one means that God uses to accomplish His eternal plan. Let me give you an example. I shared this with some of our seminary students this week. We were looking at one of their assignments, 1 Samuel 1. 1 Samuel 1, it becomes clear there that God had determined in eternity past to do several things. First of all, God had determined to give barren Hannah a son. Secondly, God had determined that that son, Samuel, would bring Israel out of the darkest period of its history, the period of the Judges, by appointing a king in Israel. Initially Saul, the people's choice, but then eventually God's choice, a man named David. And it's also clear that God intended, through the line of David, to bring the Messiah, the Perfect King, who will rule forever. Now think about that. All of that was in God's eternal plan–a son to Hannah, and that son would be a kingmaker who would bring David to bear, and through David to bring the Messiah and to bring The Perfect King who would reign forever. All of that in the eternal plan of God. But how or by what means did God accomplish that eternal plan? Read 1 Samuel 1, it was in answer to the humble prayer of one godly woman. That's how He did it all. In the same way, beloved, we pray, and when we pray, it may be that God determined in eternity past to accomplish part of His great plan by answering our prayer. No wonder Jesus says, “When you pray!”

Let's pray together. Father, we are amazed at Your greatness and at Your wisdom that You could weave into Your eternal plan answers to our prayers, our humble prayers expressed in love and dependence on You. Father, help us who are Your people to pray, and to pray not with the wrong motives, not to gain a reputation with people or to gain Your merit, Father, simply to

pour out our hearts before You, trusting You to work Your sovereign purpose in and through those answers.

And Father, I pray for those here who don't know You. Lord, sadly, You don't hear their prayers because You don't listen to the requests of other people's children. Father, I pray that today they would repent and believe in Your Son, and they would become Your adopted child by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. May You accomplish that in their hearts today for the glory of Your name and for the blessing of Your Son, in whose name we pray, amen. Amen!