

OPENING PRAYER



The Inspiration of St. Matthew,
Caravaggio, 1602

Proper 28¹

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written
for our learning:
Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn,
and inwardly digest them,
that we may embrace and ever hold fast
the blessed hope of everlasting life,
which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ;
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

MATTHEW 6²

Concerning Almsgiving

6 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2 “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your alms may be done in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.[a]

Concerning Prayer

5 “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6 But whenever you pray, 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.[b]

7 “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

9 “Pray, then, in this way:

Our Father in heaven,
may your name be revered as holy.
10 May your kingdom come.
May your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
11 Give us today our daily bread.[c]
12 And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And do not bring us to the time of trial,[d]
but rescue us from the evil one.[e]

¹ *Episcopal Book of Common Prayer* pp.236

² All Bible quotations and footnotes are from the *New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition*. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

14 “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others,[f] neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Concerning Fasting

16 “And whenever you fast, do not look somber, like the hypocrites, for they mark their faces to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.[g]

Concerning Treasures

19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust[h] consume and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust[i] consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The Eye

22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 23 but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If, then, the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

Serving Two Masters

24 “No one can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.[j]

Do Not Worry

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink,[k] or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life?[l] 28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ 32 For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God[m] and his[n] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

34 “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

Footnotes

6.4 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) add *openly*

6.6 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) add *openly*

6.11 Or our bread for tomorrow

6.13 Or us into testing

6.13 Or from evil. Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) add, in some form, *For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever. Amen.*

6.15 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) add *their trespasses*

6.18 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) add *openly*

6.19 Gk *eating*

6.20 Gk *eating*

6.24 Gk *mammon*

6.25 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) lack *or what you will drink*

6.27 Or *add one cubit to your height*

6.33 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) lack *of God*

6.33 Or *its*

OVERVIEW³

Matthew now delivers guidelines for the Jewish-Christian cult (6:1-18) after expounding on the messianic Torah (5:17-48). Matthew is attempting to explain exactly what is new in the community of believers in Jesus Christ. He compares the Christian practices of almsgiving, prayer and fasting with the “hypocrites” in the synagogues and with the Gentiles. The followers of Jesus are in Matthew’s opinion different from the surrounding world. They have their own law, and their own religious practices.⁴

Matthew uses Jesus’ words to establish the legitimacy of Christianity over against the synagogue and a partial definition of the nature of the church. Hence, the communal nature of the Lord’s Prayer. The goal is a community with no divisions, so forgiveness is essential.⁵

Righteousness is defined as being in a right orientation with God. Righteousness is not done to be seen by others. Right deeds must come from right intention. This involves humility and self-forgetfulness. Three examples follow: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. The examples are all structured the same: declaration of subject, prohibition of wrong practice, and instruction on proper practice.

6:1-4 Concerning Almsgiving (Giving to the Poor)

A contrast between the piety of the hypocrites and the piety rewarded by the Father in heaven on almsgiving, prayer and fasting. Alms or charitable gifts were given in synagogues on the sabbath day. Hypocrites is a frequent charge of Matthew leveled against the Pharisees.

6:5-15 Concerning Prayer

Rejects praying in public places with the intent of being seen by others, and to avoid long winded or repetitious prayer. The comment not to use empty phrases like the Gentile may be an indicator that Matthew’s community was largely Jewish-Christian.

The Lord’s Prayer (6:9-13) is a model of conscious brevity. It balances praying for every day needs with a potential eschatological message.

Synoptic Gospels Comparison of the Lord’s Prayer

Matthew seems to draw on Q Source, as did Luke for the majority of the prayer, and from Mark for the final verses on forgiveness.

Mark 11:25	Matthew 6:9-15	Luke 11:1-4
	9 “Pray, then, in this way: Our Father in heaven, may your name be revered as holy. 10 May your kingdom come. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.	1 “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” 2 So he said to them, “When you pray, say: Father,[a] may your name be revered as holy. May your kingdom come.[b]
	11 Give us today our daily bread.[c] 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And do not bring us to the time of trial,[d] but rescue us from the evil one.[e]	3 Give us each day our daily bread.[c] 4 And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.”[d]

³ Sources include notes from Barton and Muddiman, Biblegateway.com, Brown, Raymond E., S.S., Harper Collins *Study Bible, NRSV Version*, Davies, W.D., Allison, D.C., France, R. T., Morris, Leon

⁴ Davies, W.D., Allison, D.C., *Matthew International Critical Commentary*, Volume 1, 1998 Notes

⁵ Davies, W.D., Allison, D.C., *Matthew International Critical Commentary*, Volume 1, 1998 Notes

25 “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”[d]	14 “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others,[f] neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.	
Footnote: 11.25 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) add 11.26: <i>But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.</i>	Footnotes: 6.4 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) add <i>openly</i> 6.6 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) add <i>openly</i> 6.11 Or <i>our bread for tomorrow</i> 6.13 Or <i>us into testing</i> 6.13 Or <i>from evil</i> . Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) add, in some form, <i>For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever. Amen.</i>	Footnotes: 11.2 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) read <i>Our Father in heaven</i> 11.2 A few ancient authorities (manuscripts) read <i>Your Holy Spirit come upon us and cleanse us</i> . Other ancient authorities add <i>Your will be done, on earth as in heaven</i> 11.3 Or <i>our bread for tomorrow</i> 11.4 Or <i>us into temptation</i> . Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) add <i>but rescue us from the evil one (or from evil)</i>

Two Views: Lord’s Prayer is or is not an Eschatological Prayer

The Lord’s Prayer as an Eschatological Prayer

The first half of the prayer can be interpreted as a condensed form of an eschatological prayer of hope.

Matthew 6:9-13	Possible Eschatological Prayer Elements ⁶
Our Father in heaven,	
hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done,	May ask God to usher in his everlasting reign.
on earth as it is in heaven.	
11 Give us this day our daily bread.[c]	May be a prayer for the bread of life or heavenly manna of the latter days.
12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.	
13 And do not bring us to the time of trial,[d]	May refer to the messianic woes or trials. (Rev 3:10)
but rescue us from the evil one.[e]	

The Lord’s Prayer’s as an Everyday Prayer

Modern commentaries see the Lord’s Prayer (LP) in eschatological terms, as a prayer for the end times. But there is nothing in the prayer’s words that those days alone are the only case for praying the prayer. The church’s experience with the prayer in the ensuing 2 millennia shows that it applies well to everyday life.

⁶ Barton and Muddiman, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Notes

The Lord's Prayer's Terms and Meanings

Matthew 6:9-15	Terms and Meanings ⁷
9 "Pray, then, in this way:	The implication is that the Lord's Prayer is a guide or example of how to pray, not an absolute format.
Our Father in heaven,	"Our" links the praying person to other believers; signaling that the LP is a communal and personal prayer Addressing God as "Father" changes Jesus' followers perception of the nature of God Jesus speaks of God as "My Father" 14 times in Matthew. This is the one place where he uses "Our Father". This posits a unique filial relationship for Jesus and a derivative filial relationship to God for Jesus' followers, though not at the same level as Jesus. ⁸ "in heaven" recognizes the Father's infinite greatness
	The prayer is a Christological claim: Jesus and His Father, through Jesus, we share in the Father, and we are praying as the Son prays. ⁹ "Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done" ¹⁰
hallowed be your name.	God's name is kept "holy", and the aspiration is that he who is holy will be seen as holy by all of creation
10 Your kingdom come.	"Kingdom" of God is a most important concept in the Gospel. The kingdom is both a present and a future reality.
May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.	The prayer looks for the perfect accomplishment of God's "will" on earth, when evil has been banished and people gladly submit to God's sovereign rule.
11 Give us today our daily bread.[c]	Jesus focus shifts to personal need for food, "daily bread", and invokes the Exodus story. It looks to God for the supply of one's immediate needs not the infinite future.
12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.	"Forgive" (Greek "release" ¹¹) recognizes that sinning puts people in the wrong with God, an offense that can be seen as a "debt" (a sin of omission). But we also have to forgive those indebted to us. We cannot seek forgiveness if we are denying forgiveness. Release can also be defined as given before, which is the definition of grace, that which is given before. ¹²
13 And do not bring us to the time of trial,[d] but rescue us from the evil one.[e]	"Trial" can also be translated as temptation or test, an implies testing in general rather than a final eschatological test. The worshipper knows their own weakness and temptations and is asking for God's help. "Evil one" traditionally associated with Satan the tempter. Echoes the Temptation of Christ (4:1-11).
14 "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others,[f] neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.	The petition for forgiveness (6:12) is the only clause in the prayer singled out for commentary at the end. ¹³ Those who "forgive" will find God's forgiveness. The forgiveness of God is not automatic or transactional, but due to God's grace and mercy we are forgiven. Our will to forgive is actually God's will to forgive in us. ¹⁴

⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Notes

⁸ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*

⁹ The Rev. Zoila Schoenbrun, St. Stephens Episcopal Church, Belvedere, CA

¹⁰ Emphasis on Your, Eugene E. Lemcio, PhD, Emeritus Professor of New Testament, Seattle Pacific University

¹¹ Eugene E. Lemcio, PhD, Emeritus Professor of New Testament, Seattle Pacific University

¹² The Rev. Zoila Schoenbrun, St. Stephens Episcopal Church, Belvedere, CA

¹³ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*

¹⁴ The Rev. Zoila Schoenbrun, St. Stephens Episcopal Church, Belvedere, CA

Matthew 4:1–11 & 6:9–13. Desert Testing / Temptation & the Lord’s Prayer^{15 16}

The question of whether the Temptation story is pastoral is possibly answered in Chapter 6, the Lord’s Prayer:

Temptation/Testing (Ch. 4)	The Lord’s Prayer (Ch. 6)
was led (1)	do not bring us (4)
forty days (2)	each day, daily (3)
he was tempted	to the time of trial (4)
by the devil	evil, the evil one
a loaf of bread (3)	bread (3)
all the kingdoms (5)	your kingdom come (2)
the Lord your God (6)	Father

The first half of the prayer is concerned with God’s honor, kingdom, and purpose¹⁷ (*Your name, your kingdom, your will*). The second half addresses human needs. Not all aspects of prayer are presented. There is no explicit confession of sin, no direct thanksgiving for blessings already received, no intercession for the needs of the world, or for those to whom the disciples are sent (or their persecutors). The fundamental starting point is worship and petition.

Note: What is noticeable by its absence is any mention of Jesus Christ, his death, resurrection, or mediation. Consider how different the Lord’s Prayer is from the Apostles or Nicene Creeds. (JWJ)

6:16-18 Concerning Fasting

Fasting was required on the Day of Atonement, but other fasting occurred during the Jewish year. “Whenever” makes the timing of other fasts up to the individual. Hypocrites want to appear to be fasting for personal and social gain. Jesus’ followers should fast in secret so only God knows. It is a matter between the individual and God.

6:19-34 Four paragraphs on earthly treasure: not storing it up; being generous; serving God instead of mammon¹⁸; and not being anxious about food and clothing. The passage contains three antitheses: earth/heaven (19-21); darkness/light (22-23); and wealth (mammon)/God (24). The focus of the first is the heart, the second is the eye, and the third is service. One’s treasure tells the tale of one’s heart. If the heart is determined to store up treasure in heaven or earth, this creates an inner light or darkness, and from this one moves onto serve God or mammon.

6:19-21 Concerning Treasures

Jesus forbids “materialism which tethers our hearts to earth”¹⁹. Real treasure is in heaven and does not consist of material things. Treasures on earth are likely to be lost. But Jesus is not saying do not make a living. But what is important is God, who is a treasure that is eternal.

“21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Jesus points out that where we put our treasure, where we focus, will tell us a lot about ourselves. He is speaking about what do you center “your” life on? It is both a statement and a question and an appeal. Be conscious of the effect of earthly treasure and how it draws our gaze, mind, and soul away from God to earthly things.

6:22-23 The Sound Eye

The pre-modern view of vision was that a light shown outward from a person’s eyes enabling them to see. To say that someone’s vision was healthy and full of light is proof of the light within. An ungenerous or unhealthy eye has no inner light with which to see the world. One is cast in an internal darkness.

¹⁵ The wording in each case is from the NRSV.

¹⁶ Eugene E. Lemcio, *The King Who Teaches: St. Matthew’s Royal Curriculum. A Pedagogical Aid*, Lessons 5 and 10 (unpublished typescript), 2022

¹⁷ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*

¹⁸ Mammon: material wealth or possessions especially as having a debasing influence. Merriam-Webster definition

¹⁹ J.R.W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 1978, p 155.

The eye is a useful illustration of spiritual possibilities. When the eye functions normally, the light it perceives means illumination of benefit to the whole body. When the eye is evil, diseased, or impaired in some way, then the body is in darkness. The light that is in you is surely not the same as the light that strikes the eye.

6:24 Serving Two Masters

The service of God must be wholehearted. Service of God or money is a binary. You can do one or the other, but not both. You cannot be a slave to God and mammon. Cannot is a strong term, it signals that it is an impossibility. Slave is also a strong term. It points to complete devotion.

Wealth is not the issue perse. The issue is our attitude toward wealth and the lack of recognition of where the wealth has come from in many cases.

6:25-34 Do Not Worry

The insecurity that people may feel serving God and not knowing where the provisions for life will come from is a pastor's addendum²⁰ (ie an addition by Matthew). Those who seek to follow the tenets of the Sermon on the Mount are undertaking hard demands which the Father in heaven will reward.

Jesus underlines the pointlessness of anxiety and the sound reasons for trusting God the Father. Life is more than the bottom rungs of Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs*. Worry is pointless and trust is well based. Anxiety also reduces people's ability to cope, whereas faith in God increases it. If God takes care of animals and nature, surely God will take care of humans made in God's image.

Worry is a static activity. It does not move your forward. It is not life giving.

Disciples are to seek as their first priority not the things they would like to have or think they need, but God's kingdom and righteousness. It is of first importance.

REFLECTION

What does the Lord's Prayer mean to me as an individual? To us as a community?

CLOSING PRAYER

We thank you, heavenly Father,
for the witness of your apostle and evangelist, Matthew,
to the Gospel of Beatitude and Grace
which you have given us in your Son, our Savior;
and we pray that, after his example,
we may with ready wills and hearts
obey the calling of our Lord to follow him;
through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

The Rev. Zoila Schoenbrun

²⁰ Barton and Muddiman, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Notes

GOSPEL COMPARISON²¹

Pericope ²²	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
On Almsgiving	6:1-4			
On Prayer	6:5-6			
The Lord's Prayer	6:7-15	11:25	11:1-4	
On Fasting	6:16-18			
On Treasures	6:19-21		12:33-34	
The Sound Eye	6:22-23		11:34-36	
On Serving Two Masters	6:24		16:13	
On Anxiety	6:25-34		12:22-32	

SLOW RELIGION: GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW



*The Inspiration of St. Matthew,
Caravaggio, 1602*

Slow Religion, The Gospel According to Matthew is a lay person-led adult education weekly series for Christians and seekers. Slow Religion uses a literary and historical approach to the ancient texts to identify and apply insights from the Gospel to today's world.

Matthew's gospel is worth studying because the author attempts to uphold Jesus' Jewish past, with Jesus ministry, death, and resurrection, in the context of the 1st Century CE Jesus movement and early church, and in a hostile Hellenistic and Jewish world.

21st Century readers recognize Matthew as the source of many of the best-known stories and sayings of Jesus as well as a social philosophy that many non-Christians believe in. Famous for its Sermon on the Mount, The Beatitudes, and other teachings, Matthew is often called the most Jewish of the Gospels, while also contributing with the Gospel of John to antisemitism.

The class is created and led by Joe Jennings and advisors include: the Rev. Zoila Schoenbrun and the Rev. Robert Gieselmann, St. Stephens Episcopal Church, Belvedere, CA; the Rev. Br. Richard Edward Helmer, Episcopal Church of our Saviour, Mill Valley, CA; Eugene E. Lemcio, PhD, Emeritus Professor of New Testament, Seattle Pacific University; the Rev. Heather Wenrick, the Episcopal Church of the Ascension, Seattle; and the Father Vincent Pizzuto, PhD., vicar at St. Columba's Episcopal Church, Inverness CA and Full Professor at the (Jesuit) University of San Francisco, New Testament and Christian Mysticism, in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies.

Prior Slow Religion Classes include the Gospel of According to Mark (2021-22), the Foundations of Christian Faith (2020-21), the Holy Spirit (2020), the Gospel According to John (2019-20), and Paul's Letter to the Romans (2017-8).

For more information, bibliography or to join the Slow Religion mailing list go to: www.slowreligion.com

²¹ Source: <http://www.gospelparallels.com/>

²² An extract from a text, especially a passage from the Bible, "a book of pericopes"