

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

MARCH 14TH-15TH, 2020 // BOOK OF MATTHEW

GIVING (MATTHEW 6:1-4)

The last main section of Jesus' sermon (5:20-48) was about a righteousness that exceeded that of the religious order of the day ("the scribes & pharisees").

- Now Jesus goes on to warn His disciples against practicing the wrong kind of righteousness (vs. 1)- where we do good things not to please God, but simply to gain approval of people.
- This religious performance that desires to gain approval of others is spiritually dangerous.

It's spiritually dangerous because it can be used as a mask or a shield behind which we hide our true brokenness and need for God.

- Religious performance is ultimately self-serving- we're not doing works to please God or serve others, but simply to make ourselves look good.
- Jesus says that those who practice this kind of righteousness are NOT rewarded by God (vs. 1) because ultimately they're not doing it for God.

Jesus then describes the people who practice this kind of righteousness as "hypocrites" (vs. 2, 5, 16)- actors who are religious show-offs with no real connection to God.

- He then looks at 3 pillars of worship- giving, praying, and fasting- and notes how a religious "hypocrite" will observe these acts of worship as contrasted to how a true disciple should observe these acts of worship.

Jesus assumes that His disciples will worship the Father through giving, praying, and fasting.

- However, Jesus cares deeply about WHY His disciples observe these practices of worship.
- We can do good things for the wrong reasons, and although God may still use them to bless people, ultimately we receive no eternal blessings from it- God sees our hearts!

So when we "give to the poor", we're not to "sound the trumpet before us" in a public place so that others will see us and praise our generosity (vs. 2).

- If we do, we won't receive a reward from God since we've already gotten what it was we were after- the applause of others (vs. 2b).
- This teaching is very relevant in a day and age of social media and self-promotion.

When we give, we're to do it "in secret" for the reward and blessings of God, not for the approval and applause of other people (vs. 3-4).

- It's not wrong for others to notice if we're generous (Acts 4:34-37, Matt. 5:16), but we're not to be generous in order that others would notice!
- To live for the applause, approval, & glory of others is foolish because it NEVER lasts (1 Pet. 1:24) and it doesn't please God.

PRAYER (MATTHEW 6:5-8)

The 2nd example of religious practice is prayer and how disciples are to practice it differently.

- Jesus isn't forbidding public prayer (1 Tim. 2:1, John 6:11, John 11:41-42, Acts 27:35), He's causing us to reflect on our motives, intentions, and desired outcomes in prayer.
- When prayer simply becomes performance art, it's completely impotent (vs. 5).

The prayer life of Jesus' disciples is to be developed in the "secret place" (vs. 6).

- When we pray to the audience of one, our Father sees, listens, and rewards us!
- A private discipline of prayer is one of the most important habits you can develop.
- God rewards those who commit to privately commune with Him through prayer (vs. 6b).

Jesus then brings up how pagans ("Gentiles") pray as an example of how not to do it (vs. 7).

- There are two improper practices that Jesus is speaking against here.
- First, is repeating a formal prayer so many times that it's said without thought to the meaning of what's being prayed.
- What God is after is sincere hearts that express themselves in authentic prayers.

Every church tradition is guilty of having its own version of "empty phrases"

- This is where the words still have meaning, but the heart and mind are no longer engaged in saying them so they are repeated thoughtlessly.
- Pagans pray this way, but disciples of Jesus aren't to pray this way.
- Jesus is warning us of repeating prayers meaninglessly like magic spells.

Secondly, Jesus is speaking against praying the same thing over and over again like God doesn't care or can't hear you.

- Persevering in prayer and praying for the same request many times is a Godly thing.
- What Jesus is referring to is spending hours at a time making the same request trying to get God to notice or care (vs. 8)

A MODEL PRAYER (MATTHEW 6:9-15)

Jesus has instructed His followers on how NOT to pray- as a performance or like a pagan.

- Instead, He says pray like this- and He gives His followers a model for prayer that contains in it every kind of prayer we could ever need.
- He tells to begin our prayers by approaching God as "our Father".

- In pagan prayer, there is a transactional relationship between man and a "god".

In other words, the one praying doesn't really have (or want) a loving relationship with the god to whom they're praying- they just have a need that this god might be able to meet.

- Christian prayer tells us to approach God by calling Him, "Father".
- God desires a close, intimate, relationship with you where you see Him as your dad and you as His son or daughter!

"...hallowed be your name." In Judaism, the name of God is treated as holy, sacred, and separate from anything else.

- Jesus was saying that reverence and an understanding of what we're doing is critical.

"Your Kingdom come, your will be done"- we don't bring before Him demands or assert our will and command God.

- Instead, we acknowledge before we even lift up our requests that God's will and His kingdom are more important than our own.

"On Earth as it is in Heaven..." Think of the multitudes of angels that are in complete submission to God and in perfect obedience to His will in heaven.

- The request is that all wills on earth be brought into the same conformity with God's will.

"Give us this day our daily bread..."-Notice how this request is ordered AFTER first seeking the Kingdom of God?

- This is an exercise of radical dependence upon God as the source of our provision.

"Forgive us our debts..."-this is an acknowledgement that we have a sin debt against God, and can nothing on our own to repay for our sins- this is also repentance.

"...as we also have forgiven our debtors..."-A disciple is willing to acknowledge that they have a great sin debt against God that has been forgiven, and in this life they also acknowledge that they will be sinned against.

- Since a disciple realizes truly how much they've been forgiven, they're willing EVERY day to extend that forgiveness to those who have wronged them.

"Lead us not into temptation..."-This is a prayer for spiritual protection against sin.

- Temptation comes from our flesh, the world, and from the enemy (Satan).
- We are told to pray for protection against these things always!
- God always provides a way of escape from temptation- but we have the choice to take it.

Verses 14-15 suggest that a lack of forgiveness on our end signifies a lack of God's forgiveness towards us.

- In other words, if there is no willingness of forgiveness in our lives towards others, we may not truly be a disciple of Jesus and a child of God-Children are to look like their Father. Forgiveness is a choice- not an emotion.

FASTING (MATTHEW 6:16-18)

The 3rd spiritual discipline Jesus addresses is the practice of fasting (abstaining from food voluntarily), which was something very familiar to the Jewish people.

- God required His people to fast on the day of atonement (Lev. 23:27), and the Pharisees fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12).
- Jesus assumes that His disciples will fast (vs. 16)- but they'll do so in a meaningful way.

Fasting is a very important spiritual discipline that helps us bring the appetites of our bodies under control & in submission to God's will.

- But simply depriving ourselves and making a show out of it to impress people with how pious we are doesn't do anything at all (vs. 16b).
- If there's no real, sincere devotion of the heart to God during a fast, it's meaningless deprivation that God doesn't reward.

When true disciples fast (notice, not "if", but "when"), they're to "anoint their head and wash their face" (vs. 17) so that their fast is not obvious or noticed by other people (vs. 18).

- A true fast is not a performance of religious piety- everything is to be outwardly normal!
- Fasting is to be, like giving and prayer, a private discipline that's done between the disciple and God and solely for the rewards of God.

The two big ideas Jesus is getting at are...

- Self-righteous, religious, hypocrisy cares more about impressing others than it does pleasing God- therefore God will never reward it.
- A true disciple cares more about pleasing God in private than performing for others in public- therefore God will reward and bless them.
- The big question becomes- whose applause and approval do I care more about?

THE APPROVAL TRAP (PROV. 29:25)

The great invitation of discipleship is to find your value first in what God says about you, and to live your life to please Him and Him alone. When the opinion of the One who matters the most matters the most to you- you can be free.