

# Sermon on the Mount

## Lesson 4 – Righteousness in Worship

### Matthew 6:1-18

Many have called the Sermon on the Mount an ordination message for the newly chosen twelve apostles. Though it was preached on a specific mountain at a specific time, this is a wonderful example of what Jesus taught every day! Let's sit at the feet of Jesus and learn too!

“After rejecting the Pharisaic interpretation of the law, Christ now moved on to show that the Pharisees’ practices, arising out of their interpretation of the law, were likewise to be rejected.” Within the rest of the sermon, he will deal with worship, the relationship with wealth, and the relationship with others. Israel had been taught wrong and had been living outside of God’s desire for them. Here is Jesus’ thoughts on their worship.

**“Take heed (Lit. be careful – command to strict attention) that ye do not your alms (Lit. acts of righteousness (worship)) before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 6:1**

This verse is a continuation of the thought from Matthew 5:20, “...except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” It sets up the next area of evaluation and teaching – Righteousness in Worship. Notice the biting sarcasm throughout. Jesus was not only calling out the hypocritical attitudes of the Religious Leaders, but the honor lavished on them by the gullible people. Everyone felt the sting of rebuke and was surprised by Christ’s boldness.

#### I. Introduction to Righteous in Worship

- “Acts of righteousness” – Almost all English translations do not have the word “alms,” instead they use “good deeds” or simply “righteousness.” Jesus has already said that outward compliance to the law without an inward heart of purity does not please God, now He will deal with three acts of worship held up by Jews as very pious.
- “to be seen of them” – Here is the issue of sin within worship that Jesus is pointing out– setting up on display one’s worship! Christ will condemn showcasing deeds of righteousness so others can observe and admire them for their piety, obedience, and holiness.
- “ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.” – The truth concerning doing acts of worship for the purpose of being seen by others, is that is the sole reward. The admiration, respect, esteem, and glory one gain from others is the only reward received. Their worship goes no further than those that see it. It certainly does not reach and please God!

Three times Jesus will call this type of worshipper a “hypocrite”, and three times He will repeat the phrase, “Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.” Again, He is pointing out the normal attitudes found in Israel at the time and what God desired, but I am afraid hypocritical worship, desiring to put on a display before others, is just the default of man, and all believers can be guilty of it!

#### II. Three Areas of Worship and the Righteous Practice God Rewards

##### A. Worship of Alms – Charitable Deeds

**“Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.” Matthew 6:2**

Wrong Alms – “Alms” are charitable deeds. The poor, widows, orphans, those suffering from illness, or disasters were often left without anything. God’s desired provision for them was to be from the generosity of others. But, instead of seeing a need and helping quietly, alm giving had become a circus complete with loud music! We are not certain of the meaning of the word “trumpet.” It could have been a literal trumpet blown to call the needy for the distribution of alms, or the clanging sound of the thirteen-metal temple offering pots, or it’s just a metaphor for the very public actions of the Pharisees when giving. But whatever it was, the whole desire of giving to the poor was to “have glory of men,” and this is what Jesus is condemning. Positively – the needy were getting help Negatively – the giver was **honored by men** but received nothing of God. Christ said, “they have their reward.” This is a commercial term meaning, “paid in full with a receipt.” God will add nothing to their shallow reward!

**“But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: <sup>4</sup>That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.” Matthew 6:3-4**

Righteous Alms – It is not humanly possible to do something that one hand is not aware of the other. Again, Jesus is using dramatic illustrations to make His point and we can be sure everyone listening understood. So, what does the word “secret” mean? It is connected to the very open, public display of giving condemned in verse 2. Jesus is contrasting the hypocritical public circus of giving to a quiet transaction done in worship to God and an attitude of help to men. It’s all about the **attitude of worship and motive**. Please remember, it doesn’t necessarily mean giving must be done anonymously, we have many examples in the book of Acts and the Epistles, of public giving and distribution of gifts, but Ananias and Sapphira from Acts 5 is a good example of a wrong attitude and motive. This self-serving and deceptive couple was struck dead by God for their gift based on lies and desiring glory among their peers. I want to also give a couple of interesting notes on word usage in these verses: “himself” – v. 4 – makes the statement very emphatic “God himself sees;” Prov. 15:3; Heb. 4:13 “openly” – v. 4, 6, 18 is not found in most texts – God will reward, but often it will not be until eternity. Jer. 17:10

## **B. Worship of Prayer – Conversation with God**

**“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.” Matthew 6:5**

Wrong Prayer – Please realize, with the word “when” in this verse, Jesus expected His listeners to pray, as He still does today. But hypocrites pray only to “be seen of men!” It’s not the “standing in the synagogues” or “in the corners of the streets,” that was wrong. But “that they may be seen of men.” They were not coming to praise God, not to bring their gratitude to Him, not to seek needs, but to have others observe their prayers! The phrase, “thou shalt not be...” is very strong language! Do not be a hypocrite for they get what they pray for – **admiration of others** – they pretended they had a relationship with God solely for the respect of others! This admiration and respect are all based on a lie, and they receive nothing more from God!

**“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. <sup>7</sup>But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. <sup>8</sup>Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.” Matthew 6:6-8**

Righteous Prayer – Jesus is presenting a very different relationship with God that the Old Testament saint didn’t understand. God was known as the Father of Israel, but here Jesus is speaking of God as their

personal Father. John 1:12 A relationship with a father should be close, personal, with an intimate bond. Jesus is giving this thought to His listeners. There are three instructions given here for this close, sweet communication with their heavenly Father. 1) **Secret** – “enter into thy closet,” - public prayer is not denounced, Jesus prayed publicly, and we see public prayer often in the early church, but our personal prayer should be done in private. My favorite time is on walks. I might be on a sidewalk, walking under a blue sky, but God and I are talking, and I am sharing my heart with Him privately! 2) **Simple** – “vain repetitions” is connected to the phrase “as the heathen do.” The pagan religions around the Jews were known for their babbling, memorized, thoughtless phrases given over and over to the idols of wood and stone. This practice had crept into the prayers of Jesus’ day. 3) **Straightforward** - God desired straightforward prayers; “much speaking,” many words were not going to win them answers. Jesus reminded them, and us, “your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.” Just as children go to their earthly father, we come to God in love, simplicity, and dependence, knowing God is aware of our every need! Is.65:24; Eph. 3:20 It is not wrong to ask for something repeatedly and persistently, but it is wrong to come to God with the attitude that our clever prayers might gain us favor.

“The Lord’s Prayer” – “The Model Prayer” Thoughts concerning the Lord’s Prayer:

- 1) Not given for meaningless reciting – “vain repetition” had just been condemned by Christ, but it has ironically become a repeated mechanical liturgy of Christian tradition.
  - 2) Given as a model or example prayer - 3 petitions directed to God and His program in the world v. 9-10 (Always easier to follow a pattern) 3 petitions to our human needs v. 11-13
  - 3) Known for being brief, simple, universal, and spiritual
  - 4) Given to the disciples at least twice – “The Disciples Prayer.” Luke 11:1-4
- Directed to God

**“After this manner therefore pray ye (Lit. - “This then, is how you should pray:”): Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.** As mentioned earlier, the personal nature of “Our Father” was foreign to the Jewish mindset relating to God. Later, Paul will explain the power of our position in Christ, “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” Rom. 8:15 And again in Gal. 4:6, “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” We have the position! We have the right! So go before God and cry out, “Dear Heavenly Father!” Also, “Hallowed” is an interesting word. It means “honored as holy.” We come before God very aware of His holiness and our sinfulness. We see this played out with Isaiah when he saw the Lord’s throne in Isaiah 6:1-5. It’s with this knowledge and attitude we reverently ask our petitions.

<sup>10</sup> **Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.** A mature Christian will add these two aspects into their prayers. 1) **Pray for Christ to come and complete the plan of God!** Pray for the literal Kingdom and for Jesus the King to sit on the throne! Pray for all the wars, pain, tears, sickness to end, and for every knee to bow before Christ! Make this a part of your prayers. Look and pray “for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” Titus 2:13 2) **Sincerely pray for God’s will to be done on earth** - in your life, the lives of your children, your church, friends, and nation – “as it is in heaven!” This part of the Lord’s Prayer has really impressed me. I find myself praying, “Lord, as your will is done every day in heaven, please, have your will done in my life here. Not my will Lord, but yours be done!”

- Directed to Human Needs

<sup>11</sup> **Give us this day our daily bread.** This is the first of the requests directed at the needs of man. Overall, asking God for our needs is demonstrating humility and total dependence on Him! “daily” is an unusual Greek

adjective only used here, the best translation might be “tomorrow’s bread.” We are not living hand to mouth; this is not about desiring from God today’s needs but asking God for all our needs – day by day.

**<sup>12</sup>And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.** This phrase is not a salvation prayer. That call to God happens one time when someone realizes their sin before Him and comes in faith and repentance based on Jesus’ death in payment for sin. “forgive us our debts,” is a prayer **we often should** have on our lips as we sin against the righteousness of God in words, actions, attitudes, and thoughts – **so many times a day!** We are indebted to God as we violate His holiness! As God is quick and willing to forgive us for the asking, we should do the same to others. Asking God for forgiveness while we withhold forgiveness from others is hypocritical – it’s sin!

**<sup>13</sup>And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:** – “don’t let us succumb to temptation, give us power over the devil” or “protect us from/in temptation” This is a wise prayer but I am afraid it is often left out of most believers’ prayers. We must be very conscious of the reality of the Devil and his desire to destroy the testimony and the effectiveness (the light and salt) of every believer. We must seek God to deliver us from the daily struggles and the fiery darts of the Evil One! James 1:12-16; I Cor. 10:12-13; Luke 22:40

**For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.” Matthew 6:9-13** This ending is called the doxology of praise based on I Chron. 29:11-13. It is an affirmation of faith in our all-powerful God. Many scholars believe that Matthew added it to complete and give it a proper Jewish ending. In Luke’s giving of the Lord’s Prayer, he has no ending passed, “but deliver us from evil.” Whether Jesus added it or Matthew, it is truth and a wonderful way to end a prayer! Reminding ourselves of the power and person of God the Father!

I challenge you to pray using this outline! If you desire to pray deeper, use Jesus’ outline!

Appendix to Forgiveness: The thought of forgiveness was so important that Jesus came back and visited it again before moving on in His sermon. Please realize, if Jesus put emphasis on it, we should too! Christ will teach it again later found in Mark 11:19-26.

**“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: <sup>15</sup> But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”**  
**Matthew 6:14-15**

This is not speaking of losing the forgiveness of God found in salvation. Our place within the family of God is secure. Rom. 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to the which are in Christ Jesus,…” This is again speaking of the daily cleansing we must seek from God. **If we are stubborn and not willing to forgive others, this is sin and cannot be forgiven by God until we acknowledge it and repent.** Forgiveness should be true of God’s children, we are forgiven much and because of it, we should be quick to forgive others!! This principle is found throughout Scripture, it is a truth of God for all men. Col. 3:12-13

### III. Worship of Fasting

**“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.”**  
**Matthew 6:16**

Wrong Fasting – Again, we see Jesus is excepting His followers to fast, the word “when” not “if” is used. But the same problem is found in the motive. The hypocrites fasted so it “appear unto men.” I’m sure

more than a few listeners snickered at Christ's words about the sad countenance put on and the "disfigure" of the faces! It seems the Religious Leaders could put on quite a pathetic show when fasting – they desired **for all to see** and Jesus was calling them out on their self-righteousness! (no grooming; mourning clothes; ashes on their head; no shoes) God only asked Israel to fast once a year, the Day of Atonement, but over the centuries, traditions set a twice-a-week fast on Mondays and Thursdays. The Religious Leaders would hold to these.

**“But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; <sup>18</sup> That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.” Matthew 5:17-18**

Righteous Fasting – Jesus did not condemn fasting but the boasting in it! He told the crowd not to make a spectacle of themselves with the desire for all to know about their fast, but to do it privately before God only. God is honored in quiet sacrifice and prayer. It is to be done before Him and for Him alone. God is pleased by our devotion to Him and knows when our motives are anything but pure!

Let's take a few minutes and remind ourselves of a few Biblical principles of fasting.

- Biblical reasons to fast – Time to meet with God!
  - 1) National crisis
  - 2) Seeking God's will – individual or corporate
  - 3) Revival – Self-examination
  - 4) In face of great temptation – overcoming an area of sin
  - 5) Great distress or sadness – refocus to God's will
- Results of fasting – Time to meet with God!
  - 1) Opportunity to pray, spend time in Scripture, meditate
  - 2) Opportunity to demonstrate to God the seriousness and sincerity of our request or need
  - 3) Opportunity to receive from God comfort in, strength, Holy Spirit leading, confidence, and the realization of His direction for our life

For the hypocrites of Jesus' day, it was about being seen by others, far from God's heart for fasting!

#### **IV. Believer's Application**

The believer's fight against hypocrisy: So how do we defend ourselves against the trap of hypocrisy? How do we recognize when we are falling into this same pit? Are we guilty of the very same attitudes Jesus pointed out concerning the hypocrites that day on the mount? Desirous of being **honored** as "holy" instead of being "holy." Desirous for **admiration** for our "purity" instead of being "pure." Desirous to be **seen** as "godly" instead of being "godly!" Ladies, hypocrisy is our default, and we must be on guard against it every single day of our earthly journey! Bottom line – it's a struggle of **pride before men vs. humbleness before God**. So, what happens if we do our worship only to be seen, honored, and admired by others? Jesus said it best, you "have your reward." That earthly honor and admiration is it and with it, you have robbed yourself of God's rewards – robbed of spiritual maturity, eternal rewards, real spiritual influence – God's rewards! What a terrible trade-off! What are some defenses against hypocrisy and pride in our life?

- 1) Awareness of a prideful default – keep in mind your sinful nature and need before God – Rom. 12:3
- 2) Pray for a humble heart before God and others – seek God for it; confess your sins often – daily, hourly – confess to God and others - James 5:6-10
- 3) Focus on pleasing God alone and if that changes confess it! 2 Cor. 5:8-9

Ladies, let's examine our worship and our heart's desire in worship and make sure we are faithful followers of Jesus in worship!