

What Jesus Has to Say About...

“What Jesus Has to Say About Religion”

Matthew 6:1-18 – February 7, 2010

Sermon Series on Matthew

WHAT JESUS HAS TO SAY ABOUT...		
A 7-Week Series on the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5-7		
Date	Message Title	Matthew
Jan 10	What Jesus Has to Say About Happiness	5:1-16
Jan 17	What Jesus Has to Say About Anger	5:17-26
Jan 24	What Jesus Has to Say About Lust	5:27-30
Jan 31	What Jesus Has to Say About Divorce	5:31-48
Feb 7	What Jesus Has to Say About Religion	6:1-18
Feb 14	What Jesus Has to Say About Money	6:19-34
Feb 21	What Jesus Has to Say About Relationships	7:1-29

The Main Point of Matthew 6:1-18

- Don't pursue religion rather pursue relationship with God

RELIGION	RELATIONSHIP
Trying to impress people with your religious acts	Trying to relate to God through communication and acts of love toward God
Done out in the open for everyone to see	Done in secret for only God to see
Reward = now = people seeing you	Reward = future/eternal = what God rewards you in heaven
Giving money in such a way as to impress people	Giving money secretly as a way to express love and appreciation to God
Praying in such a way as to impress people	Praying in such a way as to truly communicate with God
Fasting in such a way as to impress people	Fasting secretly as a way to draw closer to God and as a love expression toward God
Outward and hypocritical	Inward and pure
Motive = to impress people	Motive = relationship with God

- How does this fit with letting our light shine before men (Matthew 5:16)? Our good works must be public so that our light shines; our acts of righteousness must be secret lest we boast about them.
- A.B. Bruce: “We are to show when tempted to hide and hide when tempted to show.”
- We are to have the courage to share our faith, live right, and do good toward others – “shine our light” (5:16). We are to be humble by engaging in our spiritual disciplines “secretly” (6:1-18).

Three Examples of Jesus' Point

- Giving (6:2-4)
 - Don't give money religiously to impress people but rather give money secretly to express love and appreciation in your relationship with God.
 - Notice that Verse 2 says “When you give” not “If you give” – Jesus assumed that we would give to the poor and to His Kingdom work.
 - hypokrites* = hypocrite; an actor under an assumed character; stage-player; one who assumes a role and identity that were not his own and performed for the audience's approval; one who wears a mask
 - When Jesus says “announce it with trumpets,” He is either referring...
 - Figuratively to an image of show that is so ridiculously ostentatious that these people might as well have been blowing trumpets as they gave; or
 - Literally to the shape of the temple money-boxes as being trumpet-shaped metal boxes; some rich people would bring their large gifts (all in pennies) and you could hear the metal clinging resounding loudly announcing their gift with its pouring noise.
 - Ways we tend to do the same today:
 - Naming buildings (or end zones) after big givers
 - Hanging plaques with the lists of names of big givers
 - Listing names of givers by categories: platinum, gold, silver, bronze
 - Instead, we are to give in such a way that “your left hand does not know what your right hand is doing” (vv.3-4).
 - John Stott: “The right hand is normally the active hand. So Jesus assumes we shall use it when handing over our gift. Then He adds that our left hand must not be watching. Not only are we not to tell other people about our Christian giving; there is a sense in which we are not even to tell ourselves. We are not to be self-conscious in our giving... dwelling on it in our own minds in a spirit of self-congratulation. Christian giving is to be marked by self-sacrifice and self-forgetfulness, not by self-congratulation.”
 - D.A. Carson: “The way to avoid hypocrisy is not to cease giving but to do so with such secrecy that we scarcely know what we have given.”
 - Leon Morris: “The Mishnah speaks of a ‘Chamber of Secrets’ in the temple where the devout could leave gifts in privacy and go away; the poor of good family would later come and receive help without knowing who their benefactor was.”
 - Bottom-line: Don't toot your own horn when you give. Don't toot your horn to others or to yourself.
 - Application #1 – How am I doing at using my financial giving as a way to express love and appreciation in my relationship with the Lord? What steps can I take to become more and more of a relational giver?

2. Praying (6:5-15)

- Notice that Verse 6 says “When you pray” not “If you pray” – Jesus assumed that we would spend time talking and listening to God.
- Jesus speaks negatively regarding two ways of praying:
 - (1) Do not pray as the hypocrites do – drawing attention to themselves (v.5)
 - (2) Do not pray as the pagans do – with meaningless repetition (v.7)
- Jesus speaks positively about several aspects of how to pray:
 - (1) Pray in secret versus in a way that draws attention to yourself (v.6)
 - (2) Pray knowing that God already knows what you need (v.8)
 - (3) Pray after the manner of the Lord’s Prayer (vv.9-13)
- Why praying “in secret” does not mean you cannot pray in a group with others:
 - (1) Because Jesus begins His sample prayer with “our” not “my” (v.9)
 - (2) Because a “room” can hold multiple people (v.6)
 - (3) Because Scripture is full of examples of people praying together as a group (Acts 1:12-15,24-25; 2:42-47; 3:1; 4:24-31; 12:5,12).
- What are the implications of God already knowing what I need before I ask Him? Why even pray? For relationship! Jim: I ask my kids questions all the time that I already know the answer to. Why? Because I want to dialogue with my children! I want to hear their voice and their heart!
- Some observations about the Lord’s Prayer (vv.9-13):
 - (1) Jesus said this is “how” to pray – not “what” to pray. Jesus did not intend for us to say the Lord’s Prayer over and over again in a rote and ritualistic way. Verse 7 tells us that this is the opposite of what He is trying to teach us! (*battolegeo* = “vain repetitions”)
 - (2) Where is the traditional doxology ending “For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory”? It is in your footnote. Not all of the original manuscripts contain it, so it is put in the footnote. It is perfectly OK to use it.
 - (3) The Lord’s Prayer provides a very helpful pattern of prayer:
 - Praise
 - Petition – God’s will and Kingdom; then our needs
 - Confession and forgiveness
 - Surrender
 - Deliverance
 - Praise
- Application #2 – Some applications for my prayer life are:
 - I choose to start praying relationally versus religiously and rotely
 - I choose to start praying using the Lord’s Prayer as my pattern
 - I choose to take advantage of opportunities to pray (secretly) with others: small group, Audience of One, Ash Weds (Feb 17 @ 7pm), prayer altar, prayer groups. See brochure at Prayer Kiosk.
 - I choose to forgive that person who hurt me (6:14-15).

3. Fasting (6:16-18)

- Don’t fast religiously to impress people but rather fast secretly to go deeper in intimacy in your relationship with God.
- Notice that Verse 16 says “When you fast” not “If you fast” – Jesus assumed that we would connect with God through fasting.
- Consider some of the reasons that people fasted in the Bible:
 - (1) to intensify their prayers regarding guidance (Nehemiah 1:4), protection (2 Chronicles 20:3), healing (Psalm 35:13), deliverance (Matthew 17:19-21), and success in the Lord’s work (Esther 4:16);
 - (2) during special assignments from the Lord (Exodus 34:28; Matthew 4:1-11);
 - (3) while preparing for ministry (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23);
 - (4) to repent as a nation in a solemn assembly (Joel 1:14; 2:15);
 - (5) to bring justice to the oppressed and to set free captives (Isaiah 58);
 - (6) to hear from the Lord prophetically (Daniel 9-10; Acts 13:1-3);
 - (7) while worshipping (Acts 13:2).
- But the absolute best reason to fast is just to grow closer in intimacy to God (Matthew 5:6; 6:33; Luke 6:21; Psalm 27:4; Jeremiah 9:23-24).
- Richard Foster: “Fasting must forever center on God. Physical benefits, success in prayer, the enduing with power, spiritual insights – these must never replace God as the center of our fasting.”
- John Wesley: “Let fasting be done unto the Lord with our eye singly fixed on Him. Let our intention herein be this, and this alone, to glorify our Father which is in heaven.”
- John Wesley called all Methodists to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, and he refused to license any preachers who would not commit to do so. Hudson Taylor was in the habit of conducting a weekly 24-hour fast during his work in China. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, did the same. The Promise Keepers movement was begun by 72 men committing to fast and pray one day a week for an entire year.
- Application #3 – I am going to try a 24-hour fast sometime in the next 2 weeks and set aside the extra time that it creates (2 meal times missed) to spend that time with God.
- See article “How to Conduct a 24-Hour Fast” on Grace Fellowship’s website: www.whatisgrace.org – click on “Pray”; click on article title.
- Philip Yancey: “I have come to see prayer as a privilege, not a duty. Like all good things, prayer requires some discipline. Yet I believe that life with God should seem more like friendship than duty. Prayer includes moments of ecstasy and also dullness, mindless distraction and acute concentration, flashes of joy and bouts of irritation. In other words, prayer has features in common with all relationships that matter.”

Questions to Discuss with Your Family, Friends, and Small Group

1. When is a time in your life when you have tended to be a “show off”?
2. Read Matthew 6:1-18 aloud and discuss its meaning and application using these notes. Share your applications with each other and pray for each other.