

Sermon on the Mount - Part 15

by David Servant

The sermon emphasizes the importance of fasting for the right reasons, focusing on love and denying selfishness, and warns against laying up treasures on earth.

Duration: 28:30

Scripture: Matthew 6:16, Matthew 6:19

Topics: "Hypocrisy", "Eternal Treasures"

Description

This sermon delves into the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, focusing on the importance of motives behind devotional practices like fasting. Jesus warns against hypocrisy and emphasizes the need to lay up treasures in heaven rather than on earth, highlighting the temporal nature of earthly possessions. The sermon also touches on the dangers of being deceived by riches and the significance of investing in eternal treasures.

Transcript

Welcome back to Galilee, Israel. And as in every program, I'm once again sitting on Mount Arbel. And it seems like every time that we do a program, I'm either fighting the little tiny fleas or fighting the wind.

And today it seems like mostly the fleas. But we went out and bought some bug spray and we're keeping them at bay today. But occasionally one slips in and I'm scratching a bite that I got already today.

All right. We're working our way through the Sermon on the Mount, which Jesus, of course, spoke not far from here in the region of Galilee. And it's a very beautiful morning once again here.

We're here in the month of July when almost every day is sunny and hot. All right. Let's take a look then in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6 and verse number 16.

We just finished the Lord's Prayer, which I prefer to call the Prayer of the True Disciple in our former segment, former broadcast. And now we come to Matthew 6 and verse 16. Jesus returns to his former theme of motives for certain devotional practices.

He has already covered almsgiving, giving to the poor. He's already covered prayer. And now finally he covers fasting.

Verse 16. Read with me if you have your Bible of Matthew 6. Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face, as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Now let's pause there and think about how sobering this is, what Christ has said. He's listed throughout this sermon people who are characterized by certain characteristics that disqualify them or qualify them to be worthy to enter into the eternal kingdom. All right.

And we've said this over and over again. But here's another case where Jesus is telling us about certain people who will not get into heaven. They are the hypocrites.

Hypocrite, the Greek word actually means one who's an actor in a play. You're just putting on a show. It's not sincere.

It's not true from the heart. And he's told us very clearly in Matthew 6, there are people who pray, give to the poor, and who fast, who will not get into heaven. Because remember, in Matthew 5.20, he said, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you won't get into heaven.

The Pharisees gave alms to the poor, they tithed as well, they prayed, and they fasted. In fact, most Pharisees fasted twice a week. Remember? Jesus told the story about the Pharisee and the tax collector, and the Pharisee said, I thank thee, Lord, I'm not like other men.

I tithe all that I get. I fast, he said, twice a week. Okay? Now, Jesus said, in another place, that these are really minor things, tithing.

And he actually, I don't think he mentioned fasting as being a minor thing. But as we study it throughout all of scripture, we see that it's not the most important thing. Why should Christ's disciples ever fast? Well, there's maybe a few reasons that we shouldn't fast.

One reason is, we want to make sure we're not going on a hunger strike, trying to twist God's arm behind his back, saying, hey God, look how much I'm suffering down here, I'm going without food, so you better answer my prayer. I do not think that there's any promise in scripture that by fasting, we can force God's hand to do anything. Okay? God responds to faith in his revealed will.

And so when we pray according to his will, John told us, then we have whatever we ask. And so fasting is not part of the equation that John gave in his first epistle for a successful prayer. Okay, but fasting does afford us a greater amount of time to seek God.

In other words, we're not distracted by the preparing of and the eating of meals, and the socialization that goes along with that, which is a lovely thing in itself. We love to eat, we love to fellowship and talk and so forth. But fasting then removes us from that segment of our life, which when you start fasting, you realize very quickly, my goodness, my life is practically dominated by eating.

Everything revolves around breakfast, lunch, and dinner. You know, what comes before breakfast, what comes after breakfast, what comes before lunch, what comes after lunch. That's how we break up our day.

What are you doing after supper? I'll meet you after breakfast. And so really, it's controlling our lives in many ways. When you cut out three meals a day, or however many meals you eat a day, you begin to

realize, I've got a lot more time on my hand.

And of course, when you're not eating, you don't like to hang around people who are eating. So you get away from them, and that gives you more time to focus on God. So it's a devotional practice.

And I have friends who have fasted as many as 40 days, although most of them do a juice fast. So they are still getting some nutrition from the various juices that they drink. I think I only know one or two people who have ever fasted 40 days, just water.

Now, the first time you fast, you think you're going to die. But you don't die. But you think you're going to die.

And boy, it has a lot of benefits from fasting, just from a physical standpoint, of cleansing your body and so forth. And there's lots of studies on that. Just from a natural standpoint, fasting occasionally is beneficial to your body.

Most people who live in America could fast for a couple of weeks, and it wouldn't affect them physically at all. But don't take my word for it. Do some study on your own.

And you could ask your doctor before you went on an extended fast. But when you fast, your body kicks into a mode where it begins to survive on all the extra fat that you have been storing up for such a time as this. And you lose weight.

That's another little benefit. But the main benefit is it gives you time to focus on the Lord, see the Lord. And when I have found it necessary to fast in my life is when I was facing real times of crisis or needing of direction in my life.

I really need to hear from the Lord regarding some significant decision I'm trying to make and so forth. And so to give me more time to try to hear the voice of God, to clear out my cluttered mind of all the other influences, fasting serves a good purpose to that end. Others have other feelings about fasting.

There is something that Jesus said one time about it. This kind of demon only comes out through prayer and fasting. The disciples, remember Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration.

A lot of folks believe that was Mount Hermon or Mount Hermon, which you can't see it here, but it's right up there in the northern part of Israel. And he came down and his disciples had failed to cast out a demon. And they later on asked him why we could not do this.

And he said, first of all, he said, don't forget this. First of all, he said, because of the littleness of your faith. And he said, if you had faith like a mustard seed, you could remove a mountain.

But then he said, but this kind does not come out except through prayer and fasting. There is some debate whether that was even in the original manuscripts. I'm not going to debate and argue that and so forth.

But clearly, if fasting had something to do with the expulsion of that demon, it was Jesus said, this kind only comes out through prayer and fasting. So fasting is not a prerequisite to cast out every demon. And obviously Jesus didn't mean you need to go spend some time fasting and as you fast, this demon will come out.

No, because he immediately cast out that demon. And he had obviously been in prayer and fasting before. And so I can only think that fasting could improve our ability to cast out that one certain kind of demon by the effect that we'd have more time for prayer and meditation and self-examination to purify ourselves in God's eyes and also to meditate on the authority that we have in Christ and the power in the name of Jesus and God's omnipotence and Satan falling from heaven like lightning and so on and so forth.

I have such little experience in casting out of demons. I feel very unqualified to talk about it. And a lot of the teaching that I've read about demons from particularly Western authors, I'm a little bit skeptical about a lot of what they say because everything's a demon, it seems, in many cases.

And they're casting out demons of this, demons of that, which are never mentioned in Scripture. And what also concerns me is they're casting them out of so-called Christians. Well, you know, I do not believe that a Christian, a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit, could possibly be possessed by a demon.

Now, many will say, yes, I agree as well, but I believe that a demon could, you know, be affecting a person's body or soul but not actually inhabiting their spirit. And I would find that, in my own thinking, that there's a good possibility of that being true. Certainly, all of us as Christians are, you know, attacked by demons in the sense that we are tempted by the devil at times.

And I don't know if the devil himself personally has time for me. So I assume it's some of his demons working me over, you know. So, yeah, we're harassed by demons.

And I realize if we yield to temptation, you know, things that are just harassing could become, then, a stronghold in your life and so forth. And, you know, the devil could lead you into a downward spiral as you yielded your will to him and listening to him. Then you could become obsessed and so forth.

And, you know, ultimately, you know, yield yourself completely to the devil. But I think this is so uncommon. Okay? I think, really, once again, we need to just focus back again on the Gospel and realize that when people are born again, if there's a demon inside of them, that demon has got to come out of their spirit.

Okay? In fact, you find that. Like when Philip went down to Samaria and preached the Gospel, one of the things it says happens, many demons were coming out of people crying out with a loud voice and many lame, paralyzed people were being healed as he was preaching the Gospel, you see. And I know of evangelists where they have described that very phenomena to me.

They're preaching the Gospel and all of a sudden, people in the congregation, in various pockets of places where people are listening, suddenly they scream out. And, you know, as they believe the Gospel, they're immediately delivered from demons. Yeah, it's kind of scary stuff, but, you know, I've read enough about it to believe that it's actually happening.

Okay, so I didn't mean to get into a big discussion about demonology here and so forth in this part of our program, but I did just want to discuss the fact that if fasting plays a role in deliverance, it's a minor role with a specific kind of demon, okay? And, you know, it's not the primary reason that you'd want to fast. And if you never run into that kind of demon, then you would never have to have fasting as a prerequisite to get that demon out, okay? You know, most demons would, of course, come out just by commanding them to come out in the name of Jesus. It's also my understanding that in order to get someone delivered, they have to want to be delivered.

And if they're so out of their mind that they don't know if they want to be delivered, you have to have a special gift of special faith in order to deliver them. All right, so some things to think about. Thanks for joining me on this segment.

Right after this break, we'll be right back, and we'll continue our study through the Sermon on the Mount. Be right back. Directly behind me is the Western Wall.

Many Christians refer to it as the Wailing Wall, but Jews call it the Western Wall. It's not part of the Temple of Solomon. It's actually a retaining wall built by Herod the Great in about 20 B.C., so Jesus would have seen this retaining wall.

When Herod improved on the temple, he flattened out the top of Mount Moriah, put these big retaining walls around it, and the temple sat upon that. That temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., and now, of course, the Dome of the Rock, Muslim Mosque of various sorts, sit on top of the Temple Mount. If we get close to the Temple Wall, we see lots of little prayer requests on pieces of paper stuffed in between the cracks of the rocks offered up to the God of Israel by pious Jews.

They're here all the time praying. Okay, welcome back as we continue our journey through the Sermon on the Mount, where in Matthew 6, Jesus is now speaking about fasting, and he doesn't focus on much at all other than just the motives of why we fast. He again said, don't do it to be seen by men.

Keep it secret. Don't announce in church, okay, I'm on the fifth day of my fast. I'm really serving God here.

Keep it quiet, keep it quiet. That way you can be sure your motives are right. And again, I want to emphasize, as I did previously, Jesus' warning once again.

There are people who pray, who give to the poor, and who fast, who all will go to hell. Because he speaks about hypocrites who do these things only to be seen by men. And the Pharisees did all those things scrupulously.

They fasted twice a week. I don't know if they fasted the whole day or just fasted one meal. But they fasted twice a week, and they all went to hell.

That's a scary thing. You see, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. Well, you know, of course, true disciples of Christ are going to be involved in giving to the poor, in prayer, and in fasting, as the Holy Spirit directs them.

But they're going to do it for the right reasons. Okay. A really interesting chapter on fasting in the Bible is in Isaiah, chapter 58.

And we're not going to take the time to go into that. I'm just giving that for your reference. Take a look there.

You'll see that God has a complaint against the people of Israel. And he says, man, you guys are fasting, but you're neglecting the more important things. While you're fasting, you're treating your servants unjustly, and so forth.

And he says, it's not just the fast that I have chosen to share your food with the needy and to clothe the naked, and so forth. And he's saying, really, I'd rather have you fast from your selfishness. That's the most important thing.

Why? Because the most important thing is to love God with all your heart. And the second most important thing is to love your neighbor as yourself. And if you focus on those two things, that encapsulates the entire law and prophets, according to the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, you know, don't major on the minors. People have made a religion, I think, out of fasting, where that becomes the major thing. And you can buy tape series, you know, CD series of 24 teachings on fasting.

You're way overboard if you've got 24 hours of teaching on fasting. Goodness gracious. It's a very small percentage of the Bible, okay? And so while you're fasting, and people are starving, and you're just keeping your food in your refrigerator, you might ought to think about that and say, you know, maybe I could deny myself the food that I don't need because look at my waistline, waistline being spelled W-A-I-S-T, where I'm wasting all my food, and maybe I should share some of my abundance with someone who doesn't have any food, okay? That would be much more in line with Scripture and the kind of fast that God has chosen.

Really, some folks that I've met over the years, and I've been a Christian for over 30 years now, the fasting, the big, the hyper-fast type Christians, they've sometimes become very proud of their great spirituality, and they kind of look down on you because you're not fasting as they are fasting, and I think they're losing spiritual ground, myself, rather than gaining spiritual ground. They'd be better off not to fast. When you do fast, make sure you drink lots of water, okay? You can only go for so long without water, and you can go for many weeks, probably, without having food, but you need to keep water or some kind of liquid in your body.

Okay, now we come to this very interesting part of the Sermon on the Mount that could be, in fact, the most neglected portion of the Sermon on the Mount, and we're going to spend the rest of this broadcast as well as the next broadcast taking a look at what Jesus said in these next six or seven verses. He says, now listen closely, verse 19, Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. Now, that is a commandment just as much as it is a commandment not to commit adultery or not to steal.

Christ commands, do not lay up treasures for yourself on the earth. Okay, the first question is, how do we define a treasure? What did he mean? Did he mean literal treasures? Because many times Christians read that, and they'll say, oh, well, I don't have any treasures. You know, treasures are like in treasure chests.

Gold coins, silver coins, rubies, diamonds, emeralds, you know, that type of stuff. Is that what Christ was speaking about? Well, obviously not, because he said, you know, where moths and rust destroy, the kind of treasures he's speaking of, moths can eat. Well, moths only eat fabric.

And so literally, Jesus is saying, clothing can be a treasure. James, writing in his epistle, of which much of it is a commentary on this Sermon on the Mount, says, woe to you who are rich. And one of the things that he says is, your garments have become moth-eaten, and your silver and your gold have become tarnished, okay? So, again, clothing can be a treasure.

Also, Jesus defined these treasures as things that thieves break in and might steal. So really, a treasure could be anything, a value that might be a temptation to a thief to break in and steal. So don't think that Jesus is only talking to kings.

There were no kings in his audience that day on the Sermon on the Mount, I guarantee you. These were poor people for the most part, subsistence farmers and tradespeople and so forth. You know, very few who would be among the wealthy class who followed Christ.

They had much, much less than, you know, you or I would possess in our modern day. And Jesus says to them, don't lay up treasures on this earth. Now, notice that the things that he characterizes as treasures are all things that hold one thing in common.

They're all temporal. That is, you know, thieves might steal them and rust might consume them and moths might consume them. So they're all temporal in their nature.

And so if Jesus were speaking today, I'm sure he would find examples that are more appropriate to our culture because the temporality of things that we have are just as temporal. Now, he would say things like, don't lay up treasures on this earth where computer chips become obsolete within a couple of years. Now, again, I'm not saying that it's wrong to own a computer because a computer could be something that you use in your business or in your ministry or have some, you know, valuable purpose in furthering God's kingdom, right? But just trying to point out the fact that, you know, they lose their value so quickly.

Don't lay up treasures on this earth, Jesus might say, where engineers sit around big tables and discuss how they can plan for appliances that they're going to manufacture to ultimately break. That's called planned obsolescence. They want you to come out and buy another one.

So they plan for the one that you're firstly buying to break. All right, don't lay up treasures on this earth where the stock market can lose a third of its value in a matter of a few weeks. Now, all these things are temporal.

Jesus then goes on to say, here's the second part of the commandment, and it all fits together. You can't look at them just by themselves, but lay up treasure in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. Well, there's no thieves in heaven, you can be sure of that.

If you're a thief, you're not going to be in heaven, so repent of your thievery. Okay, so he's just trying to give us wisdom. Everything, really, on this earth potentially can be a treasure, and it's a treasure if, you know, we're clinging to it and it doesn't serve any real useful purpose other than just to make us more secure because we've got more stuff or we're more prepared for that rainy day, and it shows we're not really trusting in God, the source of our supply.

All right, lay up in heaven, because when we lay it up in heaven, it will never perish. This is just good wisdom, good investment wisdom. We have a lot of people today trying to tell us, you know, you better save for your retirement and so forth.

Do you have enough saved? Are you along the path well enough? Because one day, you're going to want to not have to work any longer, you're going to need money, and people are panicking about that. I don't have enough money saved for my retirement. I better start investing, investing, getting ready for the future.

But you realize, your life is like a second in eternity, and by saving for retirement, you're preparing for a nanosecond and potentially ignoring all of eternity, getting ready to enjoy the last remaining years of your life, so then you die and go to hell. Well, that would be rather foolish, wouldn't it? Jesus told a parable one time of a rich man who, you know, was like that. He wasn't rich toward God.

He was very prosperous. He just built bigger barns, and he said, well, just take my ease. I'm going to retire now.

And everybody would have envied him, because he retired with all that abundance, but God said, you fool. Tonight, your soul is required of you. Who's going to own now what you prepared? All that treasure that you laid up on this earth now is worthless to you, because you've gone on to another world.

Now you're in eternity, and all that you work for is absolutely worthless, whereas you could have been wise and shared your abundance and laid up lots of treasure up there in heaven, and therefore, when you leave this earth, you'd have had treasure waiting for you in heaven. You'd have gone to heaven where your heart and your treasure was. Instead of going to hell, because money was your God, and Jesus was not your Lord.

You see? So Jesus is warning us of the very thing that so many have fallen into that trap, being deceived by riches. Jesus talked about how the deceitfulness of riches can enter in and choke the gospel right out of our lives. What are the deceitfulness of riches? They promise you happiness, but they never deliver.

Some of the most unhappy people on this earth are people who have lots and still want more. It's like drinking salt water. It doesn't quench your thirst.

You just want more and more and more, and you can't get enough, because you will not be satisfied. It's impossible. As long as money is your God, as long as you think your happiness will be found in that.

But our culture is sending us images, thousands every day, that are trying to persuade us that you can be happy if you have more stuff. If you lay up more treasure on this earth, you can be happy. Well, that may be true in one sense.

You might be happier now, but you'll be sorrier later, because you were foolish in storing up all your stuff in something that was going to perish. I mean, what would you think of me if I took all the money that I had earned all my life and had saved it scrupulously and put it in a box right now, and I threw it right over this cliff behind me? You'd say, well, you're a fool. You just threw it all away.

Well, can you see, in essence, that's what everyone's doing. He's saving up money and piling up treasures and so forth and getting more and more and more. You know, one day, the day they die, all that they worked for will be absolutely worthless.

And so that's why Christ tells his disciples, your heart should be in heaven, so lay up your treasures there. That'll prove that's where your heart is. And he has a lot more to say, which we'll cover in our very next program.

Okay, so you don't want to miss that one. Hey, thanks for joining me. Until next time, keep following Jesus with all your heart.

God bless you. Hey, there's a whole lot more happening through the ministry of Heaven's Family than just this teaching broadcast. Heaven's Family consists of three divisions, the first of which is Shepherd Serve.

And through the ministry of Shepherd Serve, we are literally equipping thousands of hungry pastors around the world with vital biblical truth every single year. We do that in two ways. First of all, by pastors' conferences.

They're happening almost every single month somewhere in the world. And secondly, through the translation and publication and distribution of a 500-page equipping manual called The Disciple-Making Minister. Pastors are just loving this book because it's full of information that helps equip them to be more fruitful for the Lord Jesus Christ.

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You can read all of our current projects at IWashungry.org. You can make a real difference. If you'd like to get involved in all three of the divisions of Heaven's Family, you can invest in what is called the Heaven's Family Mutual Fund. It's a great idea.

You can read about it at all three of our websites. Thanks so much. God bless you.

IWasHungry.org

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