

All That Jesus Taught Bible Study - Part 21

by Zac Poonen

Jesus teaches that we should not seek honor from men in our giving, praying, and fasting, but rather do these things in secret and for God's glory.

Duration: 25:11

Scripture: Matthew 6:5

Topics: "Christian Living", "Prayer Life"

Description

This sermon delves into the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 6, focusing on the importance of giving, praying, and fasting with the right attitude. It emphasizes the need to keep these acts of righteousness secret before God, avoiding seeking honor from others. The sermon also highlights the significance of genuine, meaningful prayer, devoid of hypocrisy and empty repetitions, stressing the importance of faith and aligning our prayers with God's will.

Transcript

We continue with our study today on the theme all that Jesus taught based on Matthew 28 and verse 20 the command that he gave us to go into every nation to make disciples and to teach them to do all that he has commanded. As we go through the scriptures beginning with Matthew, we discover how little of that has been taught to believers that which Jesus wanted every single believer to know what he had commanded. So we've been looking at Matthew chapter 5 and completed that in our last session.

We want to now look at Matthew chapter 6. What did Jesus command? Everyone, every disciple on earth needs to be taught how to do all that he has commanded. Here in Matthew chapter 6 and we're the first 18 verses he's speaking on one wrong attitude. We've already seen a number of wrong attitudes in the previous verses from chapter 5 21 to 48 and here's another wrong attitude and that is seeking honor from human beings.

First in relation to giving alms or giving money, charity or giving for the Lord's work. Second in relation to prayer and third in relation to fasting. In all these three areas giving, praying, fasting.

Jesus said it's very important that we do not allow men to know anything about our sacrifices in the matter of giving or praying or fasting. We should keep these secret before God as far as possible and this is the one of another area where our righteousness is to surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees. Remember we mentioned that when we looked at Matthew 5 20 that that is as it were the heading for almost the rest

of the Sermon on the Mount.

In what way is our righteousness to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees in order for us to enter into God's kingdom. We saw a number of things in chapter 5 and now he says in the matter of our giving our attitude in giving must be completely different from the Pharisees who were hypocrites who wanted people to know what they were giving. He said beware of practicing your righteousness before men.

That's the fundamental principle and that righteousness he breaks down to giving, praying, fasting in all these areas. He said don't do it in order to be noticed by people. Now we cannot avoid people noticing it sometimes and we don't have to feel guilty if people happen accidentally to know about it, or there's no way we can avoid it.

But we don't do it in order to be noticed by men. That's the point. Otherwise you have no reward of your father in heaven.

Do you know the number of people who have prayed and fasted and given for the Lord's work who are going to give get a zero reward in heaven according to this verse? Because they wanted other people to know how much they gave. They wanted other people to know how much they prayed. They wanted other people to know how much they fasted.

So let's look at these these three areas. First of all in the matter of giving. He said when therefore you give alms verse 2 do not sound a trumpet before you.

Jesus always had a way of exaggerating something to highlight a point. He spoke about swallowing a camel, straining out a gnat. Now literally speaking nobody strains out gnats or swallows camels.

He spoke about having a log in your eye. It's impossible to have a log in your eye and here he speaks about blowing a big trumpet and then giving. Nobody blows it a literal trumpet before they give money.

But Jesus was exaggerating in order to highlight a point. And that is you want people to know what you're giving so that you can get honor from them. And Jesus said well if you do that I say to you such people already have got their reward.

That means that what they wanted was honor from men not from God and so they got it. So there's no reward from God left for them because they got their reward right here. But he said when you give don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

Meaning that another member of the body of Christ should not know what you have given so that your arms may be in secret and your father who sees in secret will repay you. This matter of giving is a very important area. In the Old Testament there was no such law which said other people should not know how much you give because everybody knew that you had to pay a tithe and tithe was not money in those days.

The Jews people were farmers and they brought their grain their mint and come in and the tithe of everything probably some of their cattle which is that tithe which they offered up to God and people would see them bringing a sheep or ox or a grain or whatever it was you couldn't hide it. There was no law which says people shouldn't see what you're giving and there was no law even in the Old Testament that you have to give cheerfully which is a rule and principle in the New Covenant. 2nd Corinthians 9 verse 7 says

God loves a cheerful giver and nobody should give grudgingly or under pressure.

So we need to understand the principles of New Testament giving. There's no law in the New Testament that you must pay 10%. The last mention of tithing being commanded is in the book of Malachi in the Old Testament and when Jesus referred to it in Matthew chapter 23 he was talking to people who were still under the Old Covenant the Pharisees and the Jewish people.

The New Covenant was established on the day of Pentecost and after that there's not a single command to Christians to pay the tithe. There's no reference to the tithe at all. There is a vague reference to Abraham having given 10% to Melchizedek in the book of Hebrews, but that wasn't a law that Abraham was following.

He could have given 20%. He could have given 2%. He could have given whatever he liked.

It happened to be 10% but there was no law there that Abraham was following and he would not have sinned if he hadn't done it. So the emphasis that we see on tithing in Christendom today is completely Old Covenant. That's what you need to understand and in fact most Christians live under the Old Covenant in many many areas.

In the Old Covenant you could only have your sins forgiven, Psalm 103. In the New Covenant, Romans 6 14 says sin will not rule over you. So when people have only forgiveness of sins and no victory over sin, they're living in the Old Covenant.

In the Old Covenant there was a congregation that could not work together as one body and when a church is like that, that cannot function together as a body, that's Old Covenant and when tithing is emphasized, that is Old Covenant again. There are many many areas where Christians today are living under the Old Covenant. They don't realize that a new covenant was established on the day of Pentecost.

It's almost like people in India not knowing that we became independent in 1947. Can you imagine somebody being ignorant of that or that we became a republic in 1950? Can you imagine somebody still imagining that the Queen of England is still our head? It's as ridiculous for people, for Christians to still live under the Old Covenant. So in the New Covenant, the principles of giving are first of all, which should be secret and that's what he emphasizes here.

2nd Corinthians 9, it should be cheerful and 1 Corinthians 16 verse 2, it says proportionate to what you have earned. There's no law as to how much you should give. You can give as God has prospered you, it says.

So if you've got much and you've got plenty to spare, you can give more and if you don't have much at all, you don't have to give, that's okay. Because God is a billionaire and he doesn't want any of his poor children to suffer. By giving to him.

If we don't understand these principles, you'll find that a lot of pastors and preachers exploit you and take advantage of you financially. But keep this in mind that when we give, we should give secretly. So any church that makes you reveal what you're giving is actually asking you to disobey the Word of God in Matthew chapter 6 and verses 1 to 4. As far as possible, all our giving should be secret, voluntary, cheerful and that's why I personally do not believe that we should put a bag in front of people and force people to give when they may not be giving cheerfully and it's probably not possible for them to give secretly because the neighbors are seeing them giving.

The way to do it I believe is to give an opportunity for people to give by keeping a box somewhere in the church where people voluntarily put it secretly, cheerfully according to their ability. But very few churches practice that because there's a tremendous love for money among most Christian preachers and in most Christian churches. So let's keep that in mind.

If you give secretly, your father who sees in secret will repay you. That's a wonderful reward God's promised that if we obey his command here one day, we'll have to wait till Christ comes again. There's going to be a great reward for those who have given sacrificially and secretly.

And then he goes on to the subject of prayer. The principle is the same. When you pray, don't be like a hypocrite.

There are a number of things he tells us about prayer as a warning. First of all, they love to be seen. Praying now says here they stand and pray in the synagogues and in the street corners in order to be seen and they have their reward in full.

Now the principle there is that if you pray in public and your aim is that other people should appreciate your prayer. That is seeking honor from men and almost everybody who begins to pray in public will have to admit that they're seeking honor when they pray. Ask yourself, do you pray in public in the same way that you pray in private? When you're kneeling by your bed alone, how do you pray? What do you say to God? Is that what you say when you're praying in public or do you make your language more flowery and bring a little tremor into your voice and behave like an actor there like a lot of people do when they pray in public to impress people that they're very earnest.

Or where they're very emotional. It's all hypocrisy. God hates it and I wish we would realize that that type of public praying is detestable before God.

He detests it and he won't even listen to it. Most public praying in churches falls under this category. Where people are praying in order to demonstrate how well they can pray before other people.

This is completely against the teaching of Jesus and the reason is because people have not been taught all that Jesus commanded. So how shall we cleanse ourselves from it? Well, the way is to judge ourselves each time we have prayed. I remember the first time I prayed as a Christian in public.

I have to confess that I was seeking honor from people about the way I prayed, but I went home and judged myself. I said Lord, that's not the way I should pray and the next time I got up and prayed in public I was still seeking honor. I went home and judged myself again, and it took me honestly a number of years before I could cleanse myself from this desire to seek honor from men in public prayer and finally after many years learned to pray to God Almighty alone to my Heavenly Father.

Have you come there? If not, I want to encourage you to work out your salvation from seeking the honor of men. These 18 verses are all referring to seeking the honor of men. It's a sin which many people don't even recognize.

It's not spoken about much. You can do a good thing and when you do it to seek honor from men it becomes a dead work. In the Old Testament, there were only bad works, evil works and good works.

There were no dead works. But in the New Testament, we read of three categories of works. There's evil works, good works and something in between called dead works.

And we are told in Hebrews 6 verse 1 that we must repent of dead works. We're told in Hebrews 9 and verse 14 that the blood of Christ must cleanse us from dead works. 1 John 1 7 says the blood of Jesus will cleanse us from all sin.

That we can understand. Do you know what it is for the blood of Christ to cleanse you from dead works? Hebrews 9 14. Nothing can be cleansed unless it's confessed.

When was the last time you confessed a dead work? What is a dead work? A dead work is a good work done for seeking honor from men. When I pray, that's a good work. But if I pray to seek the honor of men, it becomes a dead work and I need to repent of that prayer.

When I give money for God's work, that's a good work. If I give money to a poor believer, that's a good work. But if I give in order to be seen by men, that good work becomes a dead work that I need to repent of.

Any work, good work, that's done with a wrong motive. Even if I do a work to get some reward from God for myself, it becomes a dead work. You know people say come and give you a tithe to our ministry and God will reward you with a car or something like that.

You're doing business with God. It's a dead work. You can't do business with God.

Whatever we do, we must do out of love for God. To glorify Him. Not because we want some return from Him.

Because we are not doing business with Him. So that's the first thing. Don't pray like a hypocrite seeking to impress people with prayer.

And I tell you, you have to be radical in your attitude if you ever want to be free from this. Otherwise, you'll never be free. Then he said, when you pray, go into your inner room and when you shut your door, pray to your father in secret.

Now, how shall we do this in public? We can do it in public too. We have a door in our mind, which we can shut. Even when I'm standing in the midst of a hundred people, there's a door in my mind I shut and I say, I'm now standing before Almighty God, my father alone.

There may be people around me, but I don't want to be conscious of them. That's one reason we close our eyes when we pray. There's no law which says you should close your eyes when you pray.

You can pray with open eyes. Jesus did that sometimes. But we close our eyes so that we don't get distracted by our surroundings, so that we don't seek honor from the people around us.

In a sense, we are shutting out the people. When we shut our eyes, we need to shut our mind too and say, father, I've shut the doors now and I'm praying to you. That's the way to pray.

And we can do that even in public. And we pray to our father in secret and the father who sees in secret will repay you. We can be absolutely sure that if I'm praying to God, my father, and not seeking honor from men, he will definitely repay me and answer that prayer.

And so, some more advice concerning how not to pray. Verse 7. Don't use meaningless repetition. Like the heathen do, because they think they'll be heard for their many words.

Now, one of the mistakes that the heathen do is meaningless repetition. Some religions have a habit of chanting something. They repeat it, and it becomes a meaningless thing.

It's possible to take some spiritual language and repeat it. It's possible for us to say, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, and it becomes quite meaningless after a while. It becomes a ritual.

Oh, praise the Lord, praise the Lord, praise the Lord. Jesus said, do not use meaningless repetition. If you read in the New Testament, the word hallelujah comes in Revelation 19, and it says, hallelujah, because of this.

And then it goes on to say another time, hallelujah, because of this. There must be a reason why we praise the Lord, not just meaninglessly. We must give thanks in everything.

But if it's a meaningless repetition of hallelujah, it can be pretty foolish. And it doesn't amount for anything before God, and it can even be taking the Lord's name in vain. Because that the last part of hallelujah, Yah, is a short form of Jehovah.

And the Jewish people were very afraid to even mention that name, lest they take the Lord's name in vain. And I believe a lot of Christians are taking the Lord's name in vain when they say hallelujah meaninglessly. I often say hallelujah.

I say praise the Lord, but I seek to say it meaningfully every single time. So I'm not against using that word, neither is God against it, but it must be meaningful, not a meaningless repetition. Do you see how Christians have not taken a simple command like this seriously? He said, Jesus said it's the non-Christians who repeat something meaningless like a chant, and that must not be true in our life.

The same thing applies to a lot of songs we sing. When we sing a song, particularly if it's a song that you've known very well, and you have sung probably 500 times, you know the tune, you like the tune, check yourself the next time you sing that song in a church, and you may discover at the end that you don't even remember what you sang. If you were to ask the average Christian who goes to, born-again Christian who goes to a church service, and ask him at the end of the church meeting, what did you tell God today in the songs you sang? They let it scratch their heads and think, what did I say? I don't even remember.

They were nice songs. We liked the tune. We have sung it 500 times, and we just sang it along without even thinking of what we were saying.

Meaningless repetition. We got to reverence God and say what we mean. You can't go before a king, or the president, or the Prime Minister of India, and just repeat something which you don't even know what you're saying.

We must have much more reverence for God. Avoid meaningless repetition, and the other thing he says is, don't think that you'll be heard for many words. Now, that's another mistake a lot of people make in prayer.

They think that if I pray for a long time, God will certainly hear me. I prayed for three hours, so definitely God will hear me. That's a lot of nonsense.

That's what the non-Christians think, that if I have prayed for a long time, then God will definitely hear me. It's not true. On Mount Carmel, the prophets of Baal prayed for many hours.

Maybe five, six hours or more. Nothing happened. Elijah got up and prayed for half a minute, and the fire fell.

So it's not a long prayer that makes God hear. It's very important to understand that. A lot of people think that, well, I prayed all night.

Of course, God's got to answer my prayer. Who said that? It's faith that brings an answer to prayer, and a heart that is free from sin. Those are the most important things.

If your heart is free from sin, if I regard iniquity in my heart, Psalm 66 verse 18 says, the Lord will not hear me. It doesn't matter if you pray all night. It doesn't matter how wonderful your prayer sounds.

If there's sin which is not settled, if there's unconfessed sin in your heart, Jesus said that if something wrong, if there's a wrong relationship between you and a brother, you hurt somebody, and you come and pray to God, God will not listen to your prayer. Go and settle that matter with your brother. So if there's a sin between you and God, or between you and a brother that's not been confessed and settled, you can be absolutely sure that you're wasting your time praying, whether you pray for one minute or ten hours.

And the other thing is, if you don't have faith, that's the second requirement. If you don't have faith when you pray, you're not going to get anything. You do not have, because you do not believe that you will receive.

Jesus said when you pray, believe, and then you will receive. So if I can, if I pray for a long time, and I don't believe God's ever going to grant that to me, then you're not going to get it. Why do we say Amen at the end of prayer? Amen is not just a signal that the prayer is over.

It's much more than that. It means that I am believing that what I have prayed, I'm going to get. Amen is a Hebrew word, which if it were translated into English, it would mean, it shall be done.

It will be so. I'm saying to God, I prayed this Father in the name of Jesus Christ, and I believe it will be done. I've asked in faith.

I believe I've asked according to your will. It will be done. Of course, in areas where we don't know what God's will is, we say, Father, not my will, but Thine be done.

In fact, as a little child, you know how little children go to their father and ask for anything. You are permitted to ask God for anything. A little child can ask for an elephant or a real airplane, not a toy airplane.

A little child can ask God for anything, ask his father for anything, and you can ask God for anything, provided you conclude your prayer with this one sentence. Nevertheless, Father, not as I will, but as thou wilt. I trust you to choose for me.

That's a wonderful attitude to have in prayer. I trust you, Father, to choose for me, and I trust you that I will get this, which I'm praying according to your will. There are many areas where God's will is revealed to us in Scripture.

We must come in faith. We must not come like a lot of prayer that goes on with Christians. You pray, and you go to those Christians and ask them, you think God will answer that prayer? They say, I don't know.

Maybe he will. It's like people who go and pray to an idol. You ask that person after he's gone and stood before that idol, you think that idol heard your prayer? I don't know, but that's exactly how it is with a lot of Christians, too.

They say, I don't know whether God's heard my prayer or not, and so we shouldn't be like that. We are not to pray like the heathen who think that we have to inform God about our needs. No, your Heavenly Father knows what you need before you even ask him.

Then why does he ask us to pray? So that we can have a sense of cooperating with God when the answer comes. We say, yes, I prayed and God answered me. That brings a closer fellowship between us and our Heavenly Father.

So let's remember these principles in giving and praying that Jesus laid down so clearly in the coming days and eliminate from our lives all the wrong ways of giving and the wrong ways of praying. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word that guides us.

We know nothing about God, but Christ has come and revealed what the Father is like, and we want to pray and give in the right way. In Jesus name, Amen.

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