

Week of October 7, 2012

Right Motives



Passage Outline:

1. When You Give (Matthew 6:1-4)
2. When You Pray (Matthew 6:5-13)
3. When You Fast (Matthew 6:16-18)

What's This About?

As followers of Jesus, *why* we seek to obey God is as important as *what* we do.

How Can This Impact Your Life?

This lesson can help you do the right things in the right way and for the right reasons.

1. When You Give - Matthew 6:1-4

Matthew 6:1-4

¹ "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. ² "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

- A. Last week Jesus told us to “do our good works “before men, so that they may see” them and glorify our Father (5:16). Now Jesus says, “be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of people, to be seen by them” (v. 1). Is this a contradiction in Scripture?
- B. The difference between the two verses lies in motivation.
 - i. In 5:16, the *primary* motive is to glorify the Father, not merely to be seen.
 - ii. In 6:1, the *primary* motive is to be seen, not to glorify the Father.
 - iii. The word “to be seen” comes from the same root word from which we get the English word *theater*.
 - iv. If we make our acts of righteousness a theatrical performance, where we have the leading role, we will not receive any applause from the Father.
 - v. God gives no reward for that kind of service.
- C. Jesus will use three examples to illustrate spiritual devotion that surpassed that of scribes and Pharisees. The first is giving to the needy.
 - i. Jesus obviously assumed His followers would be gracious givers, for He said, “when you give to the poor,” not “if you give.”
 - ii. We cannot avoid giving to the poor simply by stereotyping all poor people as unwilling to work, wanting something for nothing, or victims of their own bad choices. This is true in some cases, to be sure.
 - iii. This does not excuse us for failing to help in a wise and generous manner.
 - iv. What Jesus condemns is giving as a means of gaining people’s admiration. He called that hypocrisy and playing acting for an audience.

- v. The reference to sound a trumpet before you give is most likely a figure of speech similar to our “blow your own horn.”

Please read the articles “Almsgiving: Its Use and Abuse” and “Hypocrite” contained in your preparation packet you picked up last Sunday. If you happened to miss it, additional copies are on the back table.

How Will You Apply These Word of Jesus?

The topic of money or giving in general often meets with discomfort, suspicion, or outright objection from many church goers. And yet, Jesus did not shy away from that subject. Having studied Jesus’ words, how would you summarize Jesus’ teaching? How are they being lived out in your own life?

Pastor Jim will lead a Teaching Event on “What the Bible has to Say about Money” on Sunday, November 17th at 7:00 pm. You may be surprised on how much the Bible has to say about our use and abuse of precious gift from God. Come and find out!

2. When You Pray - Matthew 6:5-13

Matthew 6:5-13

⁵ "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰ your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us today our daily bread. ¹² Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]

- A. The second example is whenever you pray, indicating Jesus indeed expects us to pray. There are many references to Jesus being in prayer, i.e. at the beginning of the day, sometimes all night, and especially before major decisions or significant events.
- B. Jesus cited three kinds of prayer to avoid.
 - i. First, don't pray as those who loved to be seen praying. While loving to pray is commendable, Jesus cautioned against praying in public just to get admiring glances or to be thought especially devoted.

Please read the article “Prayer Customs in First-Century Judaism” contained in your preparation packet you picked up last Sunday. If you happened to miss it, additional copies are on the back table.

- ii. We are not to pray in babble like or “sing-songy” words like the idolaters. Jesus was not forbidding praying for the same thing over and over. Jesus praises persistence in prayer (see Matthew 7:7-11). Nevertheless, we are not to think that many words or even repetition of words will ensure God’s positive response. Bottom line, the Lord hears heartfelt prayers but ignores ego-centered and empty-headed performances.
- iii. We do not have to inform God of endless details about our needs. Jesus reminded us the Father knows the things you need before you ask Him. That’s a comforting thought, and we are assured that He will

answer in ways that best meet our needs, further His kingdom, and enhance our usefulness.

Please read the article “The Church’s Use of the Lord’s Prayer” contained in your preparation packet you picked up last Sunday. If you happened to miss it, additional copies are on the back table.

C. The Lord’s Prayer:

- i. **Our Father, who is in Heaven.** We don’t pray to the Great Someone in the Great Somewhere, but to Our Father in heaven. Our human fathers were not always the most loving or wise examples their children need; but most of them wanted to be and tried to be. God is the ideal Father—all-loving, all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful, and always present with us.
- ii. **Holy is our Father’s name.** In Biblical terms, one’s name stood for the person. When we hear our best friend’s name, we don’t think about how it sounds or is spelled. We think of the person whose friendship is precious to us. Likewise, God’s name is His person. Misuse His Name and we dishonor His person.
- iii. **Your kingdom come.** The kingdom comes in two ways: into the hearts of all who have submitted to Jesus as Lord and when Jesus’ returns when He will establish His Kingdom forever.
- iv. **May the Father’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven.** While God desires all people to be saved (See 2 Peter 3:9), He will not force people to believe but permits people to reject and turn from Him. Our Father used even sin’s consequences to achieve His good and gracious will (See Romans 8:28).
- v. **Give us bread today.** In this prayer, Jesus reminds us to live life one day at a time. If we are granted more time to live out our lives, God will certainly care for us then too. But remember, God provides what we need, and not necessarily what we want.
- vi. **Forgive us as we forgive others.** Please do not misunderstand this teaching. We cannot earn forgiveness by forgiving. So what did Jesus mean? He is simply saying that those who refuse to forgive have not truly experienced God’s forgiveness. Forgiveness can be difficult when we have been terribly hurt. But with the Lord’s help, we can and must forgive.
- vii. **Do not bring us into temptation.** We know God is good and does not tempt us to sin (see James 1:13). We are asking that our Father would keep us on the straight and narrow, so that we are not led astray by Satan.
- viii. **Deliver us from the evil one.** As the Father supports and strengthens us in those times of temptation, we are being delivered from the evil one?
- ix. The concluding doxology is not in the earliest manuscripts we have of the Gospel of Matthew, but everything in it is doctrinally and devotionally sound. We can trust Him to lead us into paths of righteousness because His is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

3. When You Fast - Matthew 6:16-18

Matthew 6:16-18

¹⁶ "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

- A. Jesus says *when* you fast, not *if* you fast. Fasting is a spiritual discipline of depriving ourselves of food as an expression of our devotion to God.
- B. Scriptures neither commands fasting nor offers instructions for how long to fast. Biblical fasting was anywhere from a single day to 40 days, (see Jesus fasting in Matthew 4:1-2).

- C. People with certain health constraints are often prohibited from food fasts.
- D. In the Bible, fasting is associated with fervent prayers of confession and intercession (see Daniel 9:3). Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast when Judah faced a national threat (see 2 Chronicles 20:3). Jesus fasted 40 days in preparation for His testing before beginning His public ministry (see Matthew 4:2). The congregation at Antioch was at worship and fasting when the Lord led them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for missions (see Acts 13:2). Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for new churches and committed them to the Lord with prayer and fasting (see Acts 14:23).
- E. Personal fasting is to be a secret act of devotion to the Father, and He promises to reward us when we fast with that intent.

Fasting for Spiritual Health

Most Americans could afford to fast from food for health reasons. While not a misuse of fasting, fasting as identified in the Bible was for spiritual health reasons?

What if we, at St. John, would call for a day of fasting and prayer? Would you join something like that? Why or why not?

In all of Jesus' teachings from today, He is encouraging us to grow in our spiritual walk with Christ without calling attention to ourselves. We are to seek to please God by doing the right things in the right way with the right motives.

Biblical Truths in Focus

1. Guard against being hypocritical in spiritual matters by making sure your motives are pleasing to God.
2. Our motive for giving to the needy and to support Christian ministries is always to honor God, never to gain recognition.
3. Our praying, both in public and in private, is to be an honest, heartfelt address to the Father, not a performance.
4. Our prayers should first reflect kingdom concerns and then personal needs.
5. Our prayers are futile if we harbor an unforgiving spirit.
6. Our fasting should be done as a private act of devotion to God, not to impress fellow believers.