



April 02nd, 2006

Bible Study

Mathew Ch. 6 > Sermon on the Mount III

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When I was a child, my parents taught me that it was the right thing to help people who are in need and that it was wrong to expect any reward for it. Shocking to me, when you read the Sermon on the Mount you cannot but notice Christ's emphasis on rewards. I realized that during my youthful years my parents were holding me to a very high standard!

We know that all humans are motivated by rewards and this is acknowledged by Jesus in Matthew Chapters 6, 10: 41-42 and 25: 14-46. Being rewarded for one's good actions is therefore right. In the familiar story of the talents, not only rewards, but punishment is also used as a motivating factor. If these motivations were banished, life would become much more complicated. Even more so than they now do, people would do as they felt with their own interpretation of good or evil. In Matthew Chapter 6, one is made aware that we either get our reward from people or God. Think of a life without any rewards or punishment: no justice and no love. It becomes meaningless. If we then were to follow any standards, it would be a societal pattern that's constantly changing.

Let us look at different aspects of rewards. A very poignant example would be the love between a child and parents. A child tries to obey his parents because he loves them and he is confident that they know what is right for him. Also, he desires their approval. As one ages this pattern continues. For instance, the love between a husband and wife motivates the desire to do things that bring joy to the partner, even if it means subjugating one's own personality. One does this in order to have love acknowledged and returned – a reward. This pattern can be compared to the spiritual form of the love a Christian has for God. In another words, when we are truly one with God, we will have such love and faith in Him that we are more conscious of Him than any other person. Our motivation will be to please Him. Our reward will be His approval; it's our ultimate goal.

Christ points out the errors that people commonly make when they expect to be rewarded. He uses the example of the Pharisees since they were the leaders of that age. Today you can pick up very similar examples especially among politicians. Let's turn to Matt. Chapter 6: 1-4. Christ makes it crystal clear that you either have your reward on earth from people or from God. To illustrate this, Christ points out the Pharisee who prays publicly for all to see, or one who gives his charitable contribution with pomp and splendor for the public to see. Jesus says here that the Pharisee will receive their reward of praise and approval from man, not God. This is emphasized in Matt. 6: 2, 5 & 16. God promises that if you seek to please Him, then you'll get your reward from Him.



April 02nd, 2006

This chapter also covers prayer, fasting, and charity. To elaborate further, prayer defines our relationship to God, fasting helps in developing self-discipline to serve God, and charity is our service to God in relationship to people, that is giving to the needy, be it spiritually or materialistically. A good example is when Jesus preached to 5,000 people. He was giving them spiritual food. However, when he saw that the crowd was tired and hungry he told his disciples to feed the people. Spiritually or otherwise we can give only what we have. Prayer to God to receive so we can give to others is very important. This concept of asking for your needs is also emphasized in this chapter and in chapter 7. Suggested extra reading is Luke 11: 5-13 and James 4:2.

Christ very clearly says that long and meaningless repetition of prayer or using words and clichés to make the prayers sound biblical and spiritual before others is actually praying to the audience. Some put on a stage-like prayer tone and all these shenanigans can actually kill the purpose of the prayer. Matthew 6:7 says "and when you pray do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words." Often spiritual leaders and others, while "praying," say what they feel the audience desire to hear. These prayers may sound great but these prayers do not receive answers. True prayer will always receive an answer; even if it's negative, we know that it will be in our best interest.

In Matt 6: 9-13, Jesus teaches his disciples the model prayer we say frequently.

Our Father who art in Heaven:

Our relationship to God as "father", in heaven to be worshipped

Hallowed be thy name:

His name is to be kept holy by us

Thy kingdom come:

Our acknowledgement and submission to Him as the king of our lives and homes and our deep desire for His return as promised. We can stretch it a little further to say that we commit ourselves to spreading the gospel so His kingdom will increase

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven:

We dedicate ourselves to do His will completely in motive and action just as the angels in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread:

After coming to God with confidence and praise and dedicating ourselves to Him, we make our personal request. This request is not only for material things but also spiritual bread, for Christ is the spiritual bread we need every day in addition to financial need and personal need

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us:

This request has a great deal of meaning to it. God forgives us our sins not because we have been good but because we have repented and yearn to be close to Him. Closeness to God can occur only when we have been cleansed and forgiven. We cannot approach God in a sinful state. This part of the prayer reminds us that unless



April 02nd, 2006

we can recognize our sins we cannot be forgiven. This also means that unless we can forgive someone who has sinned against us, we do not deserve forgiveness from Him

Lead us not into temptation:

Discerning humans recognize that it is not possible to resist all temptation and evil. This prayer acknowledges this fact and seeks God's help to "deliver us from evil"

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever:

This is perhaps the most thrilling part of the Lord's Prayer. Here we not only end with the adoration of God but show our faith in Him, His glory and strength. It also shows our faith in His promise, our future, and our belief in His return.

Next time you say the Lord's Prayer, do not rush through it, as is sometimes the habit in our churches, but take time to meditate on the implication of your prayer.

Matt.6: 16-18 touches on fasting. Fasting is emphasized throughout the Old and New Testament and is very much part of Christian practice and tradition. Since our roots are in India (or the east) where fasting is an integral part of other religions in the area such as Hinduism, Islam (especially with Ramadan), Judaism, and Buddhism, we are familiar with this practice. Christ fasted for forty days after his baptism and before the start of his ministry. Fasting not only helps us to stay healthy and not over-indulge in food, it helps to develop self-discipline and self-control. Above all, it purifies our body and helps us to concentrate and meditate upon God. Let us remember that indulgence is not only for food, but even things such as television, games, and anything else that you go overboard on. If you think about it, fasting helps us avoid slavery to our bodies (I Cor. 9: 27). Pleasuring our body and mind leads to the craving for worldly things that can destroy us in the end, e.g. obesity resulting in diabetes, high blood pressure, and even senility. There is a warning from Christ, however. He states that when we fast we sacrifice for God, but if we do it so that people praise and ennoble us for our self sacrifice, then we have received our reward on earth and can not expect any from God.

In Matt.6: 19-34, Jesus talks about some of the things that involve our goals and approaches to our goals while living in this world. This part is especially meaningful for young people and teens that have their lives ahead of them. It would be hypocritical to say that we never think about success and wealth in our lives. We yearn for material matters such as houses, cars, ideal career and many other 'treasures'. These earthly treasures are like 'will o' wisps' that are impermanent. But there is the treasure in heaven which is permanent and eternal. One is superficial, and gives you momentary satisfaction, but can disappear quickly leaving you devastated and insecure while the other gives you peace, happiness and heavenly blessings. So where should we be storing our treasures?

Nowhere in the Bible does it say that one should not be wealthy or that poverty is a blissful state. What is "written in stone" is that hoarding treasures on earth for the sole goal of being wealthy should not be any kind of goal. However, working diligently is advised. Don't interpret God's graces as a license for laziness. If wealth is one of the side effects of hard work so be it, but making money should not be the sole purpose in our life. Money should not consume you or become an obsession. Remember, money cannot buy you happiness, peace, a God-fearing family, or a



April 02nd, 2006

place in heaven. Having said that we need to remember in this day and age, the distance between the have's and the have's-not are increasing. Circumstances like poverty, economic inequality, social injustice, lack of human rights, etc. are all factors that can nudge a person away from God. We as Christians should work to alleviate these problems wherever we are. People who have been given wealth should do their best to try and level the ground as best as possible. People should share their wealth [I dislike the word charity, share is better], and get involved in trying to make life better for others in every way they can, including offering love and understanding. Preaching the gospel alone is not enough. It is difficult to concentrate on God when one is dying of starvation. When we are given much, much is expected of us. Each one of us has a choice. It is either to have our hearts with God who sacrificed himself for us or to concentrate on earthly success, wealth and power. You cannot serve two masters, God and money.

In Matt 6: 22-24, Christ teaches that the eyes are the lamps for our body. If we are blind, light cannot get in and we are left in darkness. If we are cross-eyed, our vision will be distorted. Likewise, if our spiritual vision is clear and concentrated on God and His glory, our whole life will be filled with light. On the other hand, if we are "double-visioned" on God and ourselves, then vision gets distorted and life's meaning gets blurred.

Christ concludes this portion of his sermon by reflecting on the unnecessary worries in our life. He tells us that just as God takes care for nature, if we are pledged to Him, He will take care of our material needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. Why should He do it? God takes care of us, His creation. Matt.6: 25-34 is a passage each one of you should read. It is a beautiful, almost lyrical passage of what God will do for his creation when we commit ourselves to Him. This gives us the reason for lack of worry and stress in our lives. Please read this passage the author - has put it together so beautifully. Christ emphasizes the fact that we should seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all other things will be given to us.

To conclude, what have we learnt in Chapter 6 of the Sermon on the Mount? As Christians, prayer, fasting, and sharing (charity) is necessary in our path to the Lord. When we perform our duty we should do so quietly and humbly for God, and not with pomp or letting the world know what we are doing. We will either get our reward in Heaven or on earth. Nothing - not wealth, worldly success, or accolades - should make us deviate from God's way. If we're close to God, we'll trust Him. When things get difficult, He'll take care of our needs. He has made this promise to us. We should not worry or feel sorry for ourselves. We should seek the love of God, the joy in trusting Him, and His peace, which naturally means freedom from worry. The notion of presenting our request to God in prayer and thanksgiving is suggested by Paul in Philippians 4: 6-7. The model prayer is the Lord's Prayer.

We need to ask ourselves if we have a clear vision of our aims in life and spiritual values. Are they blurred as if cross-eyed? Go back to the lesson on ambition and money. Be honest with yourself. Do you worship money, however reluctantly? Are material things like food, fashion, jewelry, praise for what you do, etc. important or can you give it up easily without a struggle? Remember that Christ can release you from being a slave to material things. You first have to surrender everything to Him. Ask an elder for some help with this.