

St. Matthew

Chapter 6

The Sermon on the Mount continued (6)

Jesus continues to preach His sermon on the mount throughout chapter 6. Jesus continues to teach about true righteousness, the righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. This is a righteousness that is without hypocrisy and which worships God alone by placing all its trust in Him. In chapter five Jesus dealt with the false teaching of the Pharisees, now He takes up the topic of their false piety. We will divide this chapter into these two sections: 'Do Not As the Hypocrites' (6:1-18) and 'A Sermon on Treasure: Trust God Alone' (6:19-34).

Do Not As the Hypocrites (6:1-18)

Already in chapter 5 we have seen the problem of the righteousness of the scribe and Pharisee, it is a do-able, see-able righteousness. The Pharisees look and act righteous, but their hearts are far from God and their neighbor. All of their good works serve themselves, for they love to receive honor from men. This Jesus calls hypocrisy. “The hypocrisy of the adversaries consists in the jarring contradiction between what they say and what they do, between the outward appearance and the inward lack of righteousness... in the fact that they are concerned about their status with men rather than their standing before God.” [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. VIII.567,568]

Later Jesus will go on a tirade against this hypocrisy, saying at least seven times, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” [23:13-36]

“Take heed that you do not do your righteousness in front of men with a view to be observed by them, else you have no reward with you Father in the heavens.” [*Matthew 6:1*] This first verse is a theme verse that will tie together all that follows. Jesus is going to uncover this hypocrisy with three examples: giving alms, prayer and fasting.

In all of these examples the question is: who is watching our pious and devotional works? Or better, who do you want to be watching? The hypocrites fashion their acts of devotion so as to assure the biggest audience. They blow the trumpets to herald their righteousness; they stand on the street corner to pray; they mope around when they fast. But the praise of men is all the reward such hypocritical piety will merit, the honor of men and the judgment of God.

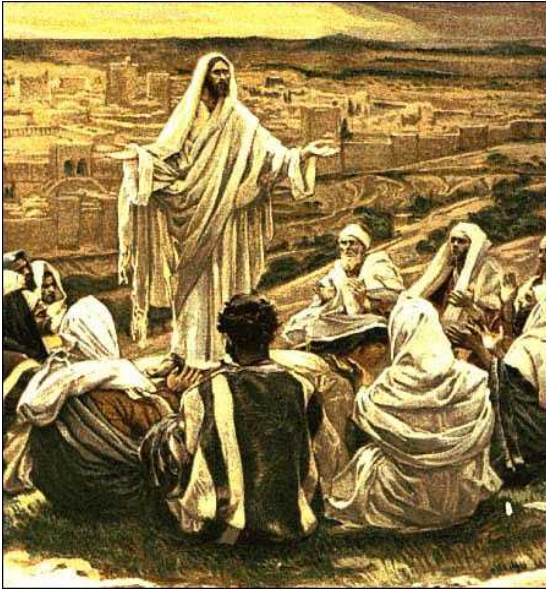
True piety, on the other hand, is done in secret. The right hand doesn't know what the left hand is giving; prayers are said in a closet; and a jolly countenance (and a little oil) covers the rigors and pain of the fast. Such are the deeds of the children of the Father. Almost every child knows how the desire to please their parents pushes out all other ambition, so it is with the children of the heavenly Father: their one aim and desire is to please Him in all that they do. We see in this text the contrast between the hypocrite and the child.

Note that the good works that are mentioned here are of a different sort than those listed in chapter 5. It is difficult to reconcile with your brother when you are in the closet praying. The good works of chapter 5 regard love for the neighbor, the second table of the Law. The good works of chapter 6 regard faith toward



Pharisees

God, the first table of the Law. Our love for our neighbor is public and should be daily manifest in good deeds. Our faith toward God and our acts of devotion are not things to be outwardly manifest, but cloaked in humility.



Our Father. As the Lord Jesus sweeps out the hypocritical prayers of the heathen, He replaces it with the beautiful gem of the Lord's Prayer, and teaches us what and how to pray. There is a lifetime of study and devotion in the five verses that compromise the Lord's Prayer. We will simply briefly consider the context of the prayer and make a few passing observations. The student is referred to Dr. Luther's magnificent treatment in the Large Catechism for further study.

There are two wrong ways to pray which Jesus is correcting: the hypocritical prayer and the heathen prayer. First, the hypocritical prayer seeks to be heard not by God but by men. But this is no prayer at all. True prayer is directed toward the God who is Our Father. It is He whom we want to hear and answer our prayers. Second, the heathenish prayer which thinks that it is heard by fervor and repetition, as if our prayer is telling God something He doesn't now and is compelling Him to do that which He wasn't going to do. Jesus gives us no such prayer.

The Lord's prayer is not gaudy or wordy and it has no sense of being a sacrifice of desire. Jesus, in these seven petitions, simply tells us that which we need the most, which is also that which the Father most desires to give us. This prayer is also preaching and promising. It preaches to us about our own sinful condition, telling us what we need, and it promises us that it is our Father's desire to give us these very things. In this way the Lord's Prayer is bound up to the Beatitudes. There Jesus was "giving into emptiness," He does the same here. If left to ourselves we would pray the exact opposite of this prayer, "My name be holy, my kingdom come, my will be done," etc. But this prayer takes us out of ourselves and teaches us what we really need.

Jesus briefly explains His prayer as well, pointing to the centrality of the forgiveness of sins, and how our own forgiveness is reflected in our forgiving our neighbor. Jesus teaches more on this in Matthew 18:21-35, the parable of the Unforgiving Servant. Indeed all of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer will be expounded in Jesus' teaching in Matthew. Who is the Father? What is His name? What is His will? What is His kingdom? What are His gifts? [Provision, Forgiveness, Guidance and Deliverance]

A Sermon on Treasure: Trust God Alone (6:19-34)

Just as Jesus teaches that all our acts of piety and devotion are directed toward our Father in heaven, that we should also look to Him for every good thing, that we should put our trust and faith in Him, that He will answer our prayer for forgiveness, for daily bread, and for deliverance. Instead of storing up for ourselves treasures on earth (which have no eternal value but are subject, like all of creation, to death), we should store up for ourselves treasures in heaven. This is where our hearts are, bound to the loving heart of our heavenly Father. We single heartedly fix our eyes on Jesus, the kingdom of heaven, His righteousness.

Jesus illustrates this with the example of the eye. If your eyes are directed heavenward toward the light that Jesus brings, then the whole body (all of our actions and affections) will be directed toward that light. On the other hand, if our eyes are directed earthward, toward the sinful and dark condition of our own hearts, then all is darkness [6:22-23].

There are only two choices: light or darkness, heaven or earth, the praise of God or the honor of men, the kingdom of God or our own kingdom, the kingdom of the devil. You cannot serve two masters. Both kingdoms demand total allegiance. You cannot worship the heavenly Father while serving any of this

world's gods, including Mammon, the money-god [6:24].

Do Not Worry. True worship and idolatry are the only two options, but they are not equal options. All false gods demand human sacrifice; the worship an idol demands is a pouring out of one's own life. The heavenly Father, on the other hand, does not demand, but gives. "Do not worry" is then a call away from idol worship to trust in the true God, the Father who loves us and will take care of us as a father cares for his dear children. The only antidote for worry is faith, simple child-like trust that we are the people of the Father's pasture and the sheep of His hands. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." [Philippians 4:6-7]

Faith is what receives the gifts that the heavenly Father gives, without and apart from works. Consider the lilies and the birds, they work not, and yet they have, because the heavenly Father provides all as a gift. Does this mean that we give up our jobs and trust that God will provide miraculously? No, for the fact that we have a job is a miracle in itself. The Lord is pleased to provide for our daily bread through the vocations He has given us and our neighbors. The point is that we work hard, but we don't worship our work. It's been said that Americans worship at their work, work at their play, and play at their worship. May it not be so among us.

Faith sets us free from worry, from the anxieties of the Gentiles [6:32], and now we are set free to seek after the kingdom of God and His righteousness. This seeking is the seeking of faith, for it is faith and faith alone that grabs onto this righteousness. Notice that just as we are not seeking our own kingdom, we are not seeking our own righteousness, but that of another: God Himself. His kingdom and His righteousness come together, and they come to us in the preaching of Jesus on the cross. "He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." [2 Corinthians 5:21] And if the heavenly Father is giving us His kingdom and His righteousness, He will withhold from us nothing good [Romans 8:32].

