

## MATTHEW 6

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, PART 2

In this chapter, the Lord Jesus continues His Sermon on the Mount. The injunctions which He gave here were directed against practices which were prevailing to a great degree among the Jews. One of these was the giving of their alms in an ostentatious manner, and offering what should have been their private devotions in public and conspicuous places. But the rules which are here laid down for their instruction on these matters are no less applicable to us than to them. We have no less need to take heed that we do not our “alms before men, to be seen of them.” And note that it is not merely the doing of “alms before men,” but the motive – “to be seen of them” – that is here forbidden. This is what we must take very earnest precaution and pains to avoid. In the exercise of devotion, it is the desiring to have our prayers heard by men – and not necessarily the action of praying in public – which the Savior here declares to be hypocritical. In fact, we must pray in public just as often (or perhaps even more so!) as we pray together in our families, or in the public assembly of the Church. But let us pray for grace so that the vain desire to be noticed by others may not influence any portion of that service which is due to God alone, and which we must render entirely for His own sake. Whenever and wherever we pray, let our pure and unmingled purpose be to be seen and heard by Him. Otherwise, our lot shall be forever cast with the hypocrites; and our sentence shall be pronounced in awful words,

The true disciple of the Lord Jesus is assured that their Father in heaven sees the private devotions with which they worship Him “in secret.” What a precious motive for the disciple of Christ! He or she may be certain that their God beholds them. This will help us to fulfill, in a full and spiritual method, all the duties of almsgiving and prayer. An all-powerful, all-wise, all-good Holy Spirit is always near us and around us. He is aware of our very inmost thoughts; and in every duty, He sees the disposition with which we do it. Not only is He aware of what we do; but He also knows what we think, why we do it, and for what purpose. Although no other human being may ever see what we do, and even though the left hand may not know what the right hand does, and even if the nearest and dearest of our earthly friends can scarcely guess the extent of either our gifts or our prayers; yet they are nonetheless heard and esteemed by our Father “which seeth in secret.” Let us esteem Him as that one chief Friend Whose praise we most covet, and Whose censure we most fear. And let us always look with hope to His reward which will one day be ours – by His grace!

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The Savior speaks against hypocrisy – verses 1-8, 16-18
- ❖ He teaches His people how to pray – verses 9-15
- ❖ The evil of being worldly-minded, and encouragement to trust in the Lord – verses 19-34



Long prayers or frequent prayers are not what our Lord Jesus meant in verse 7 by “vain repetitions.” We read in Luke 6:12 that Christ Himself “continued in prayer all night.” And His Apostle has enjoined on all Christians to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). The repetitions which are here forbidden in our prayers are those such as were used by the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:26), who called “from morning even until noon, O Baal, hear us!” We have another instance of the same practice in the men of Ephesus (Acts 19:34), who “all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” It seems that they thought that they should be heard because of their abundance of words, bring repeated over and over and over again. We, on the contrary, acknowledge that our heavenly Father is more willing to hear us than we are to pray! And we are here assured by Christ Himself that He “knoweth what things we have need of before we ask.” We do not pray to Him in order to give Him information; but rather, we do so for the expression of our own humble dependance, and out of a conviction that it is thus that He best delights to give.

For our guidance, we have a form of words that is set down here by our Lord (verses 9-13); it may be used as a prayer in itself, and it may also be taken as a pattern of what all our prayers should be. “Our Father.” We are to address the Almighty as our Father – thereby praying to Him with reverence and love, as to the One Who made us and cares for us. “Which art in heaven.” He does not dwell visibly upon earth; but by faith, we see (or ought to see) His dwelling-place in heaven. “Hallowed be thy name.” We desire that His holy name may be worshiped devoutly by all. “Thy kingdom come.” We pray for the hastening of that day of the consummation, both in earth and heaven, of the happiness which He has in store for all His redeemed ones. The period of our warfare shall soon be over; and then the time shall arrive when the knowledge of Him shall cover the earth, and sin and sorrow shall be no more! Meanwhile, however, we pray further, “Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.” We beseech Him to give grace to us and to all mankind, so that we may know and do His will – conforming the desires of our hearts to it, and exercising our souls in its devout fulfillment. “Give us this day our daily bread” – neither poverty nor riches (Prov. 30:5), neither lack nor excess; but only the food that is convenient for us, according to our various stations in life. And herein we also pray that He may impart to our souls the Bread of Life; and such measures of Divine grace, day to day, while life endures, to establish and strengthen us (see 1 Peter 5:10). “And forgive us our debts” – the many sins which we commit, the many omissions that we are guilty of, and the many debts which we owe to Him. “And lead us not into temptation” – that is, situations which will prove to be too severe for our frail selves to endure. “But deliver us from evil!” We ask Him to save us in each trial which He has ordained for us, and to rescue us from the power of the evil one, and to preserve us from the evil pollution of this wicked world and our



corrupted nature. “For thine is the kingdom.” He rules over all! His is “the power” to support, deliver, and save; and His is also “the glory” of all the good things that we enjoy in our creation, preservation, and redemption – “for ever,” to all eternity! Such is the prayer which our Lord Jesus has set forth for our instruction. Let us endeavor to pray always “after this manner” – remembering to always ask for spiritual blessings as well as for temporal ones, and to always plead with the fervent desires of our innermost heart.

The act of fasting (verses 16-18) is to deny ourselves, either in quantity or kind, the food which we feel inclined to partake of. We find traces of this practice, as a religious exercise, in almost all parts of Scriptural history. But although it is evident from several passages in the New Testament that Christians are expected to fast on due occasions, we do not find any particular directions for doing so. In fact, it is only in this passage that we have any directions for it at all. Hence we understand that the season and the degree of fasting are left to the decision of each person’s own conscience. In its proper usage, fasting is an exercise of the power to control our fleshly appetites. And whenever it is undertaken in earnest, for that purpose, it will promote our growth in Christian piety, and it will be rewarded by our Father Who sees in secret. But for this purpose, it must be done in secret – that is, without ostentation, and without intention for it to be seen by others.

Having thus, in the matter of fasting, struck at the very root of all pride and spiritual conceit; our Lord next proceeds to denounce another very grievous evil – namely, covetousness (verses 19-23). In order to cure us of this malady, He first points us to see the perishable nature of all earthly wealth; and He contrasts it with the security of treasures in heaven, which He assures us will endure undiminished forever. This single consideration would do much to take our too-fond affections from this world’s goods, and to turn our views to the promised riches of eternity. Many times, those things which we covet here on earth fail us when we reckon them as our own. In any case, we ourselves must one day leave them and the world that they belong to, and go to a world where they cannot follow us. But Jesus also reminds us that wherever we lay up our treasure, there our hearts will be also. How, then, can we endure to have our hearts confined to earth? How can we allow our soul, which came forth from God, to be tied down to the gross and vain enjoyments of a world that shall soon pass away? Allowing our hearts to be thus attached to this world is like our eye, which should enlighten and guide the body, becoming dark with blindness. Let us always endeavor to see clearly and correctly with the eye of our innermost soul; and may we have the Lord’s grace to fix it upon those treasures above, which Christ has revealed to our faith.





It is impossible to serve two masters (verse 24), and this fact is proved by the experience of human affairs. Hence we may better understand, and should more readily admit, that we cannot serve both God and our greed. Therefore, if we would escape captivity to this world's lusts, and be earnest servants of God; we must adopt the Gospel-principle to cherish no painful anxiety over the comforts and enjoyments of this present life. This lesson is inculcated by the testimony of all things that we see around us (verses 25-34). The firmament above, the earth below, the grass of the field, and the birds of the air all proclaim aloud to man the Providence of their Almighty Maker. What folly and sin it is for us who cannot exert any power to even add the smallest measure to our height, to distrust the Fatherly care of the God Who gives us our very being!

Yes, it is true that we have to work and provide for ourselves. It is true that labor is our appointed lot, and industry is our duty. But this is only so much the more reason why we should watch and take heed, lest these necessary things become a snare to our souls by stealing that attention and earnest thought which ought to be given to everlasting life. Therefore, our blessed Lord first exposes the folly of laying up treasures upon earth by showing us that we cannot lay them up both here and also in heaven, any more than we can simultaneously serve two masters. Next, He lays bare the very root of covetousness by bidding us to have no anxious thoughts for the tomorrow of this world's brief existence.

Eternity is before us. We shall live forever in the presence of God, we shall behold His face, and we shall enjoy His glory. This is the "tomorrow" which we *would* do well to think upon continually! Let us not neglect that which we are sure will last forever, in order to dwell upon that which is so uncertain. Let us not violate the plain command of Christ by continually meditating upon what we shall eat, or what we shall drink, or what we shall be clothed with. Instead, let us consider the shortness of our time here below, and the uncertainty of our enjoyment of even one more tomorrow; and let us diligently employ each moment as it comes, in preparation for that heavenly state which has no end. The way of doing so is plainly set down here. It is to seek "first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." Whatever we are doing, we must make this our chief business; whatever we have next to do, we must do this first of all. We must seek the Kingdom of God (that is, His future glory and His present grace) and His righteousness (that is, the holiness of life which He commands, and the righteousness which is by faith in Jesus Christ). This is what we must do; and the method that we must take, besides meditating upon heaven and desiring it, is to labor after it by holiness of life. Then shall all these things also be added unto us. In such measure as God knows to be for our good, He will give us the comforts of this world for a time; and He will reserve for us an inheritance in heaven forever!

*Thank You, Lord, for the promise that all our necessary things shall be granted to us; for if we are heirs of salvation and heaven, we shall not die of starvation! Amen.*