

**Lighthouse Bible Church**

**June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012**

**Matthew 7: 5 – 18**

**Hidden or Hypocritical Praying & Fasting**

**Stand – Read – Pray Scripture reading Luke 18: 9 - 14**

Several weeks ago we began looking at this passage in Matthew Chapter 6 that is talking about 3 important areas of the Christian life. Those areas are giving, prayer and fasting.

This is Jesus in the middle of His sermon on the mount and he is talking to His disciples and a multitude of people about various issues going on in that time that really are issues of the heart.

He talks about murder and says ‘you have heard it said you shall not murder but I say whoever is angry with his brother is in danger of judgment. He says ‘you have heard it said you shall not commit adultery but I say to you whoever looks on someone with lust commits adultery, where, in their heart.

So Jesus is talking about heart issues and issues important to the Christian life. We get to chapter 6 and Jesus begins to talk about 3 areas of worship; in giving and prayer and fasting and He does it by comparing the heart attitude in which giving and praying and fasting is done in true worship or hypocrisy.

He does it by contrasting the hypocritical religious leaders who want to be seen by people, with the proper acts of giving and praying and fasting which is to be seen, privately, by God who sees in secret.

Last time we looked at Verses 1 – 4 in the area of charitable giving and all that it entailed. Today we are going to look at Verses 5 – 18 as we see two other important acts of worship to God and that is praying and fasting.

I am combining these two together because many times in scripture you see both prayer and fasting mentioned together. I shared last Sunday in Sunday school just on fasting and I have the notes on the back table, because like prayer these two topics are inexhaustible in the time we have.

In these verses the Lord teaches His disciples not to pray with mindless repetition, but with a restful confidence in the sovereignty of an all knowing God. So He starts out in Verses 5 & 7

**Verse 5 and why you pray you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.**

Jesus said don't be like the religious leaders in their hypocritical praying because they wanted to be seen and heard by men, not by God.

The Jews were a praying people, especially the religious leaders and they prayed several times a day and they prayed several passages of scripture 3 times a day, **9, noon and 3 pm.**

The problem was that they would recite the same prayer over and over again and it would be nothing more than reciting words with little or no meaning in their heart.

Another problem was they would only pray at the prescribed times and no other time. It became ritual and routine and they would pray **many words** over and over again, **like the heathen or pagan or unbeliever**, thinking that would gain favor with God but it was nothing more than **vain repetition**. There is nothing wrong with praying repetitiously, Jesus says it is wrong when it is **vain** or empty or useless-meaningless repetition. In **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14: 15** Paul said **I will pray with understanding**

And notice where they would pray, **standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the street**. They purposely tried to be at those places at 9 noon and 3. The synagogue was the place of public worship and prayer and there is nothing wrong with praying there unless you go there because there are a lot of people there to hear you.

Nothing wrong with praying on a street corner unless you go there, where a lot of people are, to be seen and heard by them and that is what Jesus is saying the religious hypocrites would do. They had no intention of talking with God or to be heard by God but to be seen by men. That is why Jesus says in **Verse 8 therefore do not be like them**.

Jesus says, just like in giving, it is not the location where you pray that is the issue, it is the issue of your heart when you are praying. Is it to be seen and heard by men or is it to be in communion with God, regardless of what men see and hear. So Jesus says in Verse 6

**Verse 6 but you, when you pray, go into your room and when you have shut your door, pray to your father who is in the secret place and your father who sees in secret will reward you openly.**

Notice, like in giving, Jesus says **WHEN** you pray, which assumes, like giving, that you will do it and in the case of praying not just at a specified time but anytime you want.

What Jesus is saying is that your prayer life is between you and God and the attitude of your heart when you approach Him. If the temptation is to be heard by people then don't pray publically. Again, there is nothing wrong with public prayer, it happens all throughout scripture, it is the heart attitude in which you are praying; is it to God or to men.

And what you do in the secret place, by way of prayer, is seen and heard by an all knowing and all seeing God who will reward you in His time and in His way. That is why Jesus said at the end of **Verse 8 for your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.**

Isn't that incredible, before you ever ask, God already knows what you will ask and what you need, because He is sovereign almighty God. I think of **Isaiah 65: 24** where it says about God **it shall come to pass that BEFORE they call, I will answer and while they are still speaking, I will hear.** He said in **Isaiah 46: 9 – 10** .. **I am God and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying My purpose will stand and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.**

Remember Daniel in **Daniel 9: 20 – 23** where Daniel was praying and the angel Gabriel came to answer his prayer even before he was finished. Gabriel said **when you first started to pray** God sent me with the answer and the answer was the great 70 weeks of Daniel prophecy.

So if God knows everything anyway and He is going to do what He wants anyway, why pray? Let me give you three reasons:

(1) Because we are commanded to all throughout the scriptures, (2) Because Jesus modeled a life of prayer and (3) Because God alone answers prayer. And by the way Jesus also taught in Luke 11 from the parable of the **persistent friend** and the parable of the **loving father** that God rewards diligence in prayer and grants requests from those who ask, just like a father would to his children.

And when we pray we align our wills with His will and allow Him to show Himself powerful, merciful, gracious, loving, Kind, and everything else we experience through our communion with Him and in His answering our prayers. *It is like sharing the gospel...*

So the next obvious question that would have been on the hearts of the disciples is ‘how do we pray’? As a matter of fact in **Luke 11: 1 – 4** after Jesus finished praying his disciples came up to Him and said **Lord teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples** and then Jesus shares with them the Lord’s prayer as He does here. Look at Verse 9

### **Verse 9 in this manner, therefore pray**

This is a simple pattern and model prayer on how to pray and it is over against that of the hypocritical praying of the religious leaders. He doesn’t say ‘pray this prayer’ He says in this manner, pray. It has 3 petitions for God’s glory and will and 4 petitions for man’s needs. Read **Verses 9 – 13**

We pray **hallowed be YOUR name, YOUR kingdom come, YOUR will be done.** And we pray give US, Forgive US, don’t lead US, and Deliver US. In this prayer we can pray: *Genuinely*, not as the hypocrites do. We can pray *Secretly*, in the quietness of our hearts in communion with God, no matter where.

We can pray *Paternally*, **Our Father in heaven**. When we use the word father, it is a reminder that we have been brought into the family of God by adoption and made joint – heirs with Christ the true Son.

We can pray *Reverently*, **Hallowed be Your name**. Hallowed means to be revered and God's name is all that God is in His nature and attributes and character. So as we pray we bring reverence to God.

We can pray *Hopefully and Expectantly*, **Your kingdom come**. We should be praying for God to set up His kingdom here on earth. How is He going to do that, through the return of His Son.

We can pray *Submissively*, **Your will be done**. Not ours with a gimme gimme mentality. We pray that we, first of all would submit to His will and then move out from there to our family, friends, community, city, state and beyond.

We can pray *Dependently*, **Give us this day our daily bread**. We don't have a need for food today like they did back then. For us it is recognizing that God alone gives us all that we need from day to day, whether spiritually, physically or externally. He gives us our next breath, He gives us the sun every day, He upholds all things by the word of His power **Hebrews 1: 3**

We can pray *Penitently*, **Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors**. This isn't talking about financial debts, He is talking about the forgiveness of sins. In **Luke 11: 4** He says **and forgive us our sins for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us**.

We need to understand in this prayer that our sins have already been forgiven, right. We have been forgiven for the penalty of our sin which is death and eternal punishment. That is not what this is talking about.

But we still sin every day, don't we. **1<sup>st</sup> John 1: 10** says **if you say you have no sin, you make Him a liar and His word is not in you.** So we still need forgiveness for those daily and hourly sins that we commit so, as **1<sup>st</sup> John 1: 9** says, we go to the Father in heaven and **when we confess our sins He is what faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** It's like what **Proverbs 28: 13** says **he who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.**

Then Jesus adds **as we forgive our debtors** or as we forgive those who sin against us. Our prayer not only needs to be for receiving God's daily forgiveness but for us to be willing to forgive those who sin against us.

In **Ephesians 4: 32** it says **be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.** Or like **Colossians 3: 13** says **bearing with one another, if anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.**

One writer said 'forgiving others also frees the conscience of guilt. Unforgiveness not only stands as a barrier to God's forgiveness and blessing but also interferes with one's own peace of mind, happiness, satisfaction and even the proper functioning of the body'. He goes on to say that 'David felt the pain of unconfessed sin'

That's why Jesus says it as clearly as He can in **Verses 14 and 15** that **when you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you don't forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.**

Someone who is unwilling to forgive others will forfeit the blessing and contentment of God. Someone who is willing to forgive others will themselves experience the cleansing and blessings of God.

When you are unwilling to forgive someone you hold yourself in bondage to guilt and bitterness and anger that will hold you there until you are willing to forgive.

So our prayer is one of seeking God's forgiveness daily as we confess our sins and being willing to offer forgiveness, in the power and strength of the Spirit of God, to those who sin against us. And finally we can pray:

We can pray *Cautiously & Protectively*, **do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.** The immediate question comes up is 'does God tempt us to evil' and the answer is no. **James 1: 13** says **let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted to evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.**

That word **temptation** is the word *perismos* in the Greek and it can mean and is used many times of a trial or a test and not a temptation as we understand being tempted.

So our prayer is asking God to no allow us to fall into a trial where we are exposed to the devices of the evil one. They recognize that they are in a spiritual battle and can not win on their own.



Remember what **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10: 13** says **there is no temptation or trial or test that has taken you but such as is common to man but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted or tested above what you are able, but will with the test allow a way to escape it.**

The prayer concludes with **for Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever amen.** Luke 11 doesn't add this because in some of the older writings on this verse they do not have this. It is a true statement but just not a part of the original manuscripts.

What Jesus is saying is that prayer is so important to the Christian life. He Himself did it often as a way of communication with His Father and we are to do it as well. Your prayer is simply talking with God.

Let me suggest something that was suggested to me many years ago as a good way to pray and it is using the acronym ACTS

**A**cknowledging God and all His attributes  
**C**onfess our sins  
**T**hank God for his provisions in your life  
**S**upplications or requests to God

Finally Jesus says in **Verses 16 – 18** there is one more important area that you as a believer need to practice and that is fasting. He says you see the importance of giving and you see the importance of praying and now look at the importance of fasting.

And He says the same thing that He has in the other two areas, **moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting.**

Here Jesus once again contrasts biblical fasting from hypocritical fasting and we understand fasting to be the total or partial withholding of food and or liquid for a certain period of time as an act of self-denial for specific purpose.

Jesus says **when you fast** two times, and just like that of giving and prayer, fasting is something that it is assumed you know what it is and that you will do. Fasting is mentioned some 80 times in scripture but it is something that is rarely taught.

Last Sunday during Sunday school I taught specifically on this topic because I knew that I would not have enough time here with combining prayer and fasting. My preference would be that you know more about prayer than you would fasting.

On the back table are the notes from that lesson that ask and answer four questions about fasting: What is fasting, Should we fast, How long should we fast and Why should we fast?

Fasting is simply withholding food or liquid for a certain period of time. It can be as short as fasting for one meal and it can be as long as 40 days and nights as was done by Moses, Elijah and Jesus. I wouldn't recommend that for you.

People fasted for different reasons because fasting, like praying and giving, is something personal between you and God. Remember that in our giving there is no certain amount to give other than giving liberally. There is no certain percentage to give like some think.

In prayer there is no certain time to pray, no certain posture in prayer and no certain things to say while praying. It is very personal between you and the Lord.

In fasting, there is no prescribed time to fast, no particular reason to fast and no particular length of time to fast, it is between you and the Lord. There are some reasons in scripture why some people fasted:

When facing God's judgment in **Joel 1: 14**

During periods of mourning in **1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 31: 11 – 13**

When concerned with the welfare of others **Psalms 35: 13**

When concerned about spiritual issues **2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 12: 15 – 17**

When facing danger or fear **2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 20: 2 – 3**

When appointing leaders for service **Acts 13: 2 – 3** and many others

There are a lot of reasons to fast and, like giving and prayer, are very personal between you and the Lord. But what Jesus does in our passage is to expose the hypocrisy of the religious leaders fasting because they wanted to be seen by men, just like in their giving and praying.

He says in **Verse 16** **they have a sad countenance and they disfigure their faces to appear to men to be fasting.** What they would do is take ashes and put them on their head and face to look gaunt and drawn and walk around looking pretentiously sad.

And either people would look at them and say look how spiritual they are it looks like they haven't eaten in a week. Or they would ask them 'what is wrong with you' O nothing, I'm just FASTING.

There was only one prescribed fast in all of scripture and that was for one day during the day of atonement according to **Leviticus 23: 27**. But like everything else, the religious leaders began a system of fasting that brought everyone into legalism and bondage to a list of rules and do's and don't's.

Do you remember in **Luke 18: 9 – 14** where the Pharisee and the tax collector went into the temple to pray? The Pharisee, the religious hypocrite, stood and prayed thus with himself ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice in the week and I give tithes of all that I possess.

Do you want to know which two days of the week they fasted on? Monday and Thursday. You want to know why? Because those were market days and everyone came into town and those 2 days the city was full of people.

Jesus said, when you fast don’t let anyone know it and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

You see our giving and praying and fasting are all acts of worship that must come from a heart of glorifying God and not to be seen by men. Each one of these acts of worship have the potential to be nothing more than deeds to be seen by men and as such will only be acknowledge by men and not God.

So as we worship in these 3 areas let us continually examine our hearts and the motive for doing and saying what we do.

Closing prayer.

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**‘Hidden or Hypocritical Praying & Fasting’**

Introduction:

Verses 5 & 7: Don't be like the hypocrites

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14: 15

Verse 8: Your Father knows the things you need

Isaiah 65: 24, Isaiah 46: 9 – 10, Daniel 9: 20 – 23  
Luke 11: 1 – 4

Verses 9 – 15: Pray like this

Genuinely, Secretly, Paternally, Reverently  
Hopefully & Expectantly, Submissively, Dependently  
Hebrews 1: 3, Penitently, 1<sup>st</sup> John 1: 9 – 10  
Proverbs 28: 13, Ephesians 4: 32, Colossians 3: 13  
Cautiously & Protectively, James 1: 13  
1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10: 13  
ACTS = Acknowledge, Confess, Thanks, Supplications

Verses 16 – 18: When you Fast

Joel 1: 14, 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 31: 11 – 13, Psalm 35: 13  
2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 12: 15 – 17, 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 10: 2 – 3  
Acts 13: 2 – 3, Leviticus 23: 27, Luke 18: 9 – 14

Notes/Application:

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Verses 5 & 7: Don't be like the hypocrites

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14: 15

Verse 8: Your Father knows the things you need

Isaiah 65: 24, Isaiah 46: 9 – 10, Daniel 9: 20 – 23  
Luke 11: 1 – 4

Verses 9 – 15: Pray like this

Genuinely, Secretly, Paternally, Reverently  
Hopefully & Expectantly, Submissively, Dependently  
Hebrews 1: 3, Penitently, 1<sup>st</sup> John 1: 9 – 10  
Proverbs 28: 13, Ephesians 4: 32, Colossians 3: 13  
Cautiously & Protectively, James 1: 13  
1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10: 13  
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Verses 16 – 18: When you Fast

Joel 1: 14, 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 31: 11 – 13, Psalm 35: 13  
2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 12: 15 – 17, 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 10: 2 – 3  
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