

## GREATEST CHAPTERS IN THE BIBLE-11

### MATTHEW, CHAPTER 06

#### I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. The true righteousness of the kingdom must be applied in the everyday activities of life. This is the emphasis in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus related this principle to our relationships to:
  - 1. God in worship (6:1-18),
  - 2. Our relationship to material things (6:19-34).
  - 3. Our relationship to other people (7:1-20).
- B. Jesus also warned about the danger of hypocrisy (6:2,5,16).
- C. The righteousness of the Pharisees was insincere and dishonest. They practiced their religion for the applause of men, not for the reward of God. But true righteousness must come from within.

#### II. OUR GIVING (Mt. 6:1-4).

- A. Giving alms to the poor, praying, and fasting were important disciplines in the religion of the Pharisees. Jesus did not condemn these practices, but He did caution us to make sure that our hearts are right as we practice them. The Pharisees used almsgiving to gain favor with God and attention from men, both of which were wrong motives.
- B. Our sinful nature is so subtle that it can defile even a good thing like sharing with the poor. If our motive is to get the praise of men, then like the Pharisees, we will call attention to what we are doing. But if our motive is to serve God in love and please Him, then we will give our gifts without calling attention to them.
- C. Does this mean that it is wrong to give openly? Must all giving be anonymous? Not necessarily, for everyone in the early church knew that Barnabas had given the income from the sale of his land (Ac. 4:34-37). When the church members laid their money at the Apostles' feet, it was not done in secret. The difference, of course, was in the *motive* and *manner* in which it was done. A contrast is Ananias and Sapphira (Ac. 5:1-11), who tried to use their gift to make people think they were more spiritual than they really were.

#### III. OUR PRAYING (Mt. 6:5-15).

Jesus gave four instructions to guide us in our praying.

- A. We must pray in secret before we pray in public (6:6).
  - 1. It is not wrong to pray in public in the assembly (1Tim. 2:1ff), or even when blessing food (Jn. 6:11) or seeking God's help (Jn. 11:41-42; Ac. 27:35).
  - 2. But it is wrong to pray in public if we are not in the habit of praying in private. Observers may think that we are practicing prayer when we are not, and this is hypocrisy.
  - 3. The word translated closet means "a private chamber." It could refer to the store-chamber in a house. Our Lord prayed privately (Mk. 1:35); so did Elisha (2Kgs. 4:32ff) and Daniel (Dan. 6:10ff).
- B. We must pray sincerely (6:7-8).
  - 1. The fact that a request is repeated does not make it a "vain repetition"; for both Jesus and Paul repeated their petitions (Mt. 26:36-46; 2Cor. 12:7-8). A request becomes a "vain repetition" if it is only a babbling of words without a sincere heart desire to seek and do God's will. The mere reciting of memorized prayers can be vain repetition. The Gentiles had such prayers in their pagan ceremonies (see 1Kgs. 18:26).
  - 2. My friend Dr. Robert A. Cook has often said, "All of us have one routine prayer in our system; and once we get rid of it, then we can really start to pray!"
- C. We must pray in God's will (6:9-13).
  - 1. This prayer is known familiarly as "The Lord's Prayer," but "The Disciples' Prayer" would be a more accurate title. Jesus did not give this prayer to us to be memorized and recited a given

number of times. In fact, He gave this prayer *to keep us* from using vain repetitions. Jesus did not say, "Pray in these words." He said, "Pray after this manner"; that is, "Use this prayer as a pattern, not as a substitute."

2. The purpose of prayer is to glorify God's name, and to ask for help to accomplish His will on earth. This prayer begins with *God's* interests, not ours: God's name, God's kingdom, and God's will.
3. If we put God's concerns first, then we can bring our own needs. God is concerned about our needs and knows them even before we mention them (6:8). If this is the case, then why pray? Because prayer is the God-appointed way to have these needs met (see Jas. 4:1-3). *Prayer prepares us for the proper use of the answer.*

D. We must pray, having a forgiving spirit toward others (6:14-15).

1. In this "appendix" to the prayer, Jesus expanded the last phrase of 6:12, "as we forgive our debtors." He later repeated this lesson to His disciples (Mk. 11:19-26). He was not teaching that believers earned God's forgiveness by forgiving others; for this would be contrary to God's free grace and mercy. However, if we have truly *experienced* God's forgiveness, then we will have a readiness to forgive others (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13).
2. Since prayer involves glorifying God's name, hastening the coming of God's kingdom (2Pet. 3:12), and helping to accomplish God's will on earth, the one praying must not have sin in his heart. The important thing about prayer is not simply getting an answer, but *being the kind of person whom God can trust with an answer.*

IV. **OUR FASTING (Mt. 6:16-18).**

- A. The only fast that God actually required of the Jewish people was on the annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:27). The Pharisees fasted each Monday and Thursday (Lk. 18:12) and did so in such a way that people knew they were fasting. Their purpose, of course, was to win the praise of men. As a result, the Pharisees lost God's blessing.
- B. It is not wrong to fast, if we do it in the right way and with the right motive. Jesus fasted (4:3); so did the members of the early church (Ac. 13:2). Fasting helps to discipline the appetites of the body (Lk. 21:34) and keep our spiritual priorities straight. Simply to deprive ourselves of a natural benefit (such as food or sleep) is not *of itself* fasting. We must devote ourselves to God and worship Him. Unless there is the devotion of the heart (see Zech. 7) there is no lasting spiritual benefit.
- C. As with giving and praying, true fasting must be done in secret; it is between the believer and God. To "make unsightly" our faces (by looking glum and asking for pity and praise) would be to destroy the very purpose of the fast.

V. **OUR USE OF WEALTH (Mt. 6:19-34).**

*Introduction.*

1. We are accustomed to dividing life into the "spiritual" and the "material"; but Jesus made no such division. In many of His parables, He made it clear that a right attitude toward wealth is a mark of true spirituality (see Lk. 12:13ff; 16:1-31). The Pharisees were covetous (Lk. 16:14) and used religion to make money. If we have the true righteousness of Christ in our lives, then we will have a proper attitude toward material wealth.
2. Nowhere did Jesus magnify poverty or criticize the legitimate getting of wealth. God made all things, including food, clothing, and precious metals. God has declared that all things He has made are good (Gen. 1:31). God knows that we need certain things in order to live (6:32). In fact, He has given us "richly all things to enjoy" (1Tim. 6:17). It is not wrong to possess things, *but it is wrong for things to possess us.* The sin of idolatry is as dangerous as the sin of hypocrisy! There are many warnings in the Bible against covetousness (Ex. 20:17; Psa. 119:36; Mk. 7:22; Lk. 12:15ff; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5).

3. Jesus warned against the sin of living for the things of this life. He pointed out the sad consequences of covetousness and idolatry.
- A. Enslavement (6:19-24).
1. Materialism will enslave the heart (6:19-21), the mind (6:22-23), and the will (6:24). We can become shackled by the material things of life, but we ought to be liberated and controlled by the Spirit of God.
  2. What does it mean to lay up treasures in heaven? It means to use *all that we have* for the glory of God. It means to “hang loose” when it comes to the material things of life. It also means measuring life by the true riches of the kingdom and not by the false riches of this world.
  4. Wealth not only enslaves the heart, but it also enslaves the mind (Mt. 6:22-23). God’s Word often uses the eye to represent the attitudes of the mind. If the eye is properly focused on the light, the body can function properly in its movements. But if the eye is out of focus and seeing double, it results in unsteady movements. It is most difficult to make progress while trying to look in two directions at the same time.
  5. Finally, materialism can enslave the will (Mt. 6:24). We cannot serve two masters simultaneously. Either Jesus Christ is our Lord, or money is our lord. It is a matter of the will. “But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare” (1Tim. 6:9). If God grants riches, and we use them for His glory, then riches are a blessing. But if we *will* to get rich, and live with that outlook, we will pay a great price for those riches.
- B. Devaluation (6:25-30).
1. Covetousness will not only cheapen our riches, but it will also cheapen *us*! We will start to become worried and anxious, and this anxiety is unnatural and unspiritual. The person who pursues money thinks that riches will solve his problems, when in reality, riches will create more problems! Material wealth gives a dangerous, false sense of security, and that feeling ends in tragedy. The birds and lilies do not fret and worry; yet they have God’s wealth in ways that man cannot duplicate. All of nature depends on God, and God never fails. Only mortal man depends on money, and money always fails.
  2. Jesus said that worry is sinful. We may dignify worry by calling it by some other name—concern, burden, a cross to bear—but the results are still the same. Instead of helping us live longer, anxiety only makes life shorter (6:27). The Greek word translated *take no thought* literally means “to be drawn in different directions.” Worry pulls us apart. Until man interferes, everything in nature works together, because all of nature trusts God. Man, however, is pulled apart because he tries to live his own life by depending on material wealth.
  3. God feeds the birds and clothes the lilies. He will feed and clothe us. It is our “little faith” that hinders Him from working as He would. He has great blessings for us if only we will yield to Him and live for the riches that last forever.
- C. Loss of testimony (6:31-33).  
To worry about material things is to live like the heathen! If we put God’s will and God’s righteousness first in our lives, He will take care of everything else. What a testimony it is to the world when a Christian dares to practice Mt. 6:33! What a tragedy it is when so many of us *fail* to practice it.
- D. Loss of joy today (6:34).  
Worrying about tomorrow does not help either tomorrow or today. If anything, it robs us of our effectiveness today—which means we will be even less effective tomorrow. Someone has said that the average person is crucifying himself between two thieves: the regrets of yesterday and the worries about tomorrow. It is right to plan for the future and even to save for the future (2Cor. 12:14; 1Tim. 5:8). But it is a sin to worry about the future and permit tomorrow to rob today of its blessings.