

Session 12 Called to Serve, Give, Pray, Fast, and Bless (Mt. 6:1-21)

I. REVIEW: INTRODUCTION

- A. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' most comprehensive statement on a believer's role in cooperating with grace and is the "litmus test" to measure our spiritual development and ministry impact. Jesus called us to cultivate ***eight beatitudes*** (5:3-12) as we pursue ***100-fold obedience*** (5:48), ***resist six temptations*** (5:21-48), and ***pursue five kingdom activities*** (6:1-21).
- B. He describes five kingdom activities that position us to receive more grace: ***serve and give*** (charitable deeds: service and/or money (6:1-4, 19-21), ***pray*** (6:5-13), ***bless adversaries*** (full forgiveness, 6:14; 5:44), and ***fast*** (6:16-18), leading to rewards from God (Mt. 6:4, 6, 18, 20).
⁴That your charitable deed [serving or giving money; v. 20] may be in secret; and your Father...will reward you openly...⁶When you pray...your Father...will reward you openly ...¹⁴Forgive men their trespasses...¹⁷When you fast...¹⁸your Father...will reward you openly.¹⁹Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...²⁰but treasures in heaven... (Mt. 6:4-20)
- C. I marvel at the simplicity and accessibility of these five kingdom activities that help people, move God, and change us over time, even though they are usually small and weak in themselves. Spiritual disciplines don't earn us God's love, but place our cold hearts before the "bonfire of His presence." He does not love us more, but gives more to our heart, when we embrace disciplines.
⁶He gives more grace...God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (Jas. 4:6)
- D. The eight Beatitudes (Mt. 5:3-12) are expressed in all five kingdom activities (Mt. 6:1-21).
1. ***Being poor in spirit***: seeing our need for breakthroughs in our heart, ministry, church, and city
2. ***Mourning for breakthrough***: being desperate enough to be extreme in pursuing breakthroughs
3. ***Walking in meekness***: having a servant spirit in the use of our resources (time, money, etc.)
4. ***Hungering for righteousness***: consistently seeking God for breakthroughs of His kingdom
5. ***Showing mercy***: treating others with a tender spirit when they fail, attack, or disappoint us
6. ***Being pure in heart***: seeking to walk in purity in our thoughts, words, and motives
7. ***Becoming a peacemaker***: bringing peace or healing to broken relationships
8. ***Enduring persecution***: bearing the stigma and pressures of standing for righteousness
- E. Jesus' exhortations to these five activities were given with one *primary warning* and one *primary promise*. He warned us against the hypocrisy of drawing attention to ourselves in our devotion to God, making this point in several different ways. He promised that the Father would reward us.
- F. Jesus called us to avoid *sounding a trumpet*, i.e., drawing attention to our devotion and passion for God. He was speaking directly to the Pharisees (Mt. 23:5-7), who operated in public with a religious spirit. Jesus was also addressing our natural temptation to sound a trumpet and draw attention to how devoted, passionate, "anointed," smart, diligent, and generous we are.
²Do not sound a trumpet...as the hypocrites [Pharisees] do in the synagogues [worship or prayer services] and in the streets [out in public] that they may have glory from men. (Mt. 6:2)

II. LIVING BEFORE GOD’S EYES: CONFIDENCE IN REWARDS

- A. We must see the value of these five small activities that help people, move God, and change us. Jesus calls us to live before God’s eyes. God values the “smallness” of these five activities. The Father sees and cares about our small works even when men do not notice or care about them.
- B. Jesus emphasized that the Father ***will openly reward*** these activities. Some of the rewards are ***external***, as circumstances are changed by God’s power. Some are ***internal***, as our hearts encounter Him and are tenderized. Some are ***eternal***, affecting our destiny in the age to come.
- C. We do these five kingdom activities with ***confidence in His rewards*** (eternal and temporal). We must have confidence that His eyes are on us and that He is responsiveness to us (Heb. 11:6).
⁶Without faith [confidence in God] it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Heb. 11:6)
- D. *Jesus taught more on eternal rewards than any other man in Scripture* (Mt. 5:5, 12, 19; 6:4-6, 18-20; 10:41-42; 16:27; 18:4; 19:21, 28-30; 20:16, 27; 22:14; 23:11; 25:21-23; Mk. 9:41; 10:21, 42-43; Lk. 6:23, 35; 9:48; 12:21, 33; 14:11; 16:11; 18:14, 22; 19:17-19; 22:26-30; Jn. 12:26; Rev. 2:7, 10-11, 17, 26-28; 3:4-5, 9, 11-12, 18, 21; 11:18; 16:5; 19:7-8; 22:12).
⁴Your charitable deed...and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (Mt. 6:4)
⁶When you pray...and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (Mt. 6:6)
¹⁸Fasting...and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (Mt. 6:18)
- E. Our wrong views of God come to light when we see Jesus’ emphasis on rewarding His people.
²⁷The Son of Man will come...He will reward each according to his works. (Mt. 16:27)
¹²My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. (Rev. 22:12)
- F. Which audience are we living before and whose applause are we seeking? Many believers never “shift over” to living before His eyes. This is where power and transformation occur in our life.
- G. Paul contrasted two ways of living: living as unto God or unto man, i.e., either seeking the applause of God or of men. Paul is telling us how to live in the Spirit and walk in freedom.
⁶...not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord. (Eph. 6:6-8)
- H. ***Eyeservice***: This speaks of serving to gain the applause and recognition of people by serving with more humility, generosity, and diligence when someone is watching. The key issue is who do we look to and who do we want to look back? Do we look for the applause of Jesus or men, and do we want Jesus or men to look back at us? We know we are looking to men if we get offended after we serve diligently and are ignored or criticized for our labors.

III. THE FASTED LIFESTYLE: EMBRACING VOLUNTARY WEAKNESS

- A. It is not enough just to resist the negative (Mt. 5); we must also pursue the positive (Mt. 6). Jesus highlighted five kingdom activities: to serve, give money, pray, bless our adversaries, and fast.
- B. The *Sermon on the Mount lifestyle*, also referred to as the *fasted lifestyle*, is a call to embrace voluntary weakness to experience more of God's power. Jesus spoke of the paradox in Paul's life of embracing weakness so as to experience more strength in the Spirit (2 Cor. 12:9). He was not referring to moral weakness, but to Paul's godly choices to embrace voluntary weaknesses.
⁹My grace [power] is sufficient for you [Paul], for My strength is made perfect in weakness. (2 Cor. 12:9)
- C. There are five types of "fasting" in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:1-18). We fast food, time, energy, money, and words by *giving, serving, praying, blessing enemies*, and *fasting food*. Each is a form of fasting, in which we voluntarily embrace weakness to experience more of God's power. In giving, we fast our money and financial strength. In serving and prayer, we fast our time and energy, investing it in others and in intercession. In giving up food, we fast our physical and emotional strength. Blessing our enemies requires that we fast our words and reputation.
- D. Possibly the greatest enemy of the fasted lifestyle among believers is the false notion that fasting is *radical Christianity* and is optional for healthy Christianity. It is not. Fasting is normal and basic to the Christian life—it is Christianity 101. It is not possible to live biblical Christianity without being committed to a lifestyle of praying, fasting, giving, serving, and blessing enemies.

IV. CHARITABLE DEEDS: CALLED TO SERVE AND GIVE (MT. 6:1-4, 19-21)

- A. We are called to ***serve and give*** (charitable deeds: service and/or money (Mt. 6:1-4, 19-21). Charitable deeds refer to acts of servanthood and financial giving. They include more than ministry to the poor, but encompass investments of time or money to serve people in God's will.
¹Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds [giving service or money; v. 20] before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. ²Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues [public meetings] and in the streets [marketplace]... Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ³But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. (Mt. 6:1-4)
- B. Later, Jesus further develops the importance of giving money (Mt. 6:19-21).
¹⁹Do not lay up...treasures on earth...²⁰lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. (Mt. 6:19-20)
- C. Giving financially to others is an expression of *fasting* our money. Serving involves *fasting* our time and energy by investing it in others. Jesus warned us to not let our "left hand" know what our right hand does, i.e., to not "congratulate ourselves." Not all giving in the early church was hidden (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35; 5:1-10; 11:29-30). The point is to be as unobtrusive as possible.

V. CALLED TO PRAY (MT. 6:5-13)

- A. We are called to pray (Mt. 6:5-8). Prayer has many forms and often includes meditation on the Word. Jesus taught us how to pray by giving us the Lord's prayer (Mt. 6:9-13).
- ⁵When you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and...the streets, that they may be seen by men...they have their reward. ⁶When you pray, go into your room...pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (Mt. 6:5-6)*
- B. Prayer is an expression of voluntary weakness that fasts our time and emotions. Instead of using all our time for the advancement of our status or success, we use some of it to seek God for ourselves and for others. Instead of using most of our free time being entertained by media, we pray. In this, we forego opportunities to network and build up our ministries or businesses.
- C. Part of the reward that God gives is in greater intimacy with Him; part of it is in increased productivity and fruitfulness that may only be seen decades later. Jesus was not banning corporate prayer meetings—the early church prayed together (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 12:5; 16:13). He was warning us not to draw attention to ourselves related to our prayer alone or in worship meetings.

VI. CALLED TO BLESS (MT. 6:14-15)

- A. We are called to bless our adversaries as part of expressing the fullness of forgiveness (Mt. 6:14-15; 5:44). This is connected with the call to resist passive love (Mt. 5:21-42). Jesus elaborates on the implications of forgiving our enemies (Mt. 6:14-15).
- ¹⁵If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you... (Mt. 6:15)*
- ⁴⁴Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you... (Mt. 5:44)*
- B. The call to actively love our enemies includes our words (bless), actions (do good), and prayers. Our enemies are adversaries, who seek to hurt or hinder us, or who hope to see us fail.

VII. CALLED TO FAST (MT. 6:16-18)

- A. We are called to fast (Mt. 6:16-18). Jesus said, “*When* you fast” not “*if* you fast,” implying that it should occur in the regular course of a disciple's life. We do not fast to motivate God to love us, but to increase our spiritual capacity to receive and feel more of His heart, Word, and power.
- ¹⁶When you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance...that they may appear to men to be fasting...¹⁷But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,¹⁸so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (Mt. 6:16-18)*
- B. Jesus emphasized that the Father will reward fasting. This proclamation makes fasting important. Jesus called us to fast because He knows that its rewards will far outweigh its difficulties. For more on fasting, get the free ebook *Rewards of Fasting* by Bickle & Candler at ihopkc.org.