

# Prayer and Fasting

Matthew 6:5-18

Introduction:

- This is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Last week we talked about pursuing after Christ being the main goal of our lives. Well here Jesus expected that his followers would be good givers, pray, and fast. All of which is a sacrifice unto the Lord.
  - When we sacrifice we learn to separate our wants from our needs. We learn what we can/can't live without
- I. The Christian's Prayer life
    - a. Judaism had a very strong emphasis on prayer and over time certain faults had crept into Jewish habits of prayer
    - b. Not as the hypocrites (put on a face/act a part)
    - c. Emphasis on location: For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets: There were two main places where a Jew in Jesus' day might pray in a hypocritical manner. They might pray at the synagogue at the time of public prayer, or on the street at the appointed times of prayer. "Prayer was not normally practiced at the street corners, but...one who strictly observed the afternoon hour of prayer could deliberately time his movements to bring him to the most public place at the appropriate time." (France)
      - i. These hypocrites prayed not to be heard by God, but to be seen by men. This is a common fault in public prayer today, when people pray to impress or teach others instead of genuinely pouring out their hearts before God.
      - ii. Rather, we should meet with God in our closet. The idea is of a private place where we can impress no one-simply get alone with God.
      - iii. The specific ancient Greek word was used for a storage where treasures were kept. This reminds us that there are treasures waiting for us in our prayer closet.

- iv. Jesus certainly did not prohibit public prayer, but our prayers should always be directed to God and not towards man
- d. God is not confined to a location! We can pray anywhere!
- e. (Mat 6:7-8) The right way to pray
  - i. Avoid vain repetitions- the danger of formalism (following a formula/recipe) illustr- prayer is not like cooking: 6 “hail mary”s, 2 “our father”s, and a dash of psalm 23
  - ii. Prayer is a conversation with God- Pray without ceasing! Ongoing, continual fellowship with Him!
  - iii. “Prayer requires more of the *heart* than of the *tongue*. The eloquence of prayer consists in the fervency of desire, and the simplicity of faith.” (Clarke)
  - iv. “Prayer is not designed to *inform* God, but to give *man* a [glimpse] of his [own] misery; to humble his heart, to excite his desire, to inflame his faith, to animate his hope, to raise his soul from earth to heaven.” (Clarke)
- f. v. 9-13- The model prayer
  - i. Note the hearers: Prayer is a special privilege for **believers**
  - ii. The only prayer of the unsaved that God promises to hear is the prayer of salvation! Romans 10:9-10, 13
  - iii. Close bond- Our Father. We have direct access to Him through Christ- no automated recordings, holds, or dropped calls
  - iv. The right kind of prayer has a passion for God’s glory and God’s agenda. His **name**, **kingdom** and **will** have the top priority.
  - v. On earth as it is in heaven- In heaven there is no disobedience or obstacle to God’s will. It is not a genie granting our own selfish desires!
  - vi. We want God’s will- Romans 8:32- “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us

all things?” In other words God will not withhold good things from us! We never “miss out” with God!

vii. The right kind of prayer will freely bring needs to God. This will include needs for daily provision, forgiveness, and strength in the face of temptation.

g. Theology of prayer: God is sovereign, and omniscient. So why pray? Because prayer is His chosen means of bringing His will to pass! That literally means there are things that God desires to do but He awaits our prayers!

h. Sadly, the church prayer meetings are the least attended meetings...

## II. Christian Fasting- v. 16-18

a. Fasting is a part of many of the world’s religions- illustr- Ramadan in Lebanon includes checking men’s tongues.

b. Clearly, Jesus assumed that His followers would fast.

c. What not to do:

i. When you fast, do not be like the hypocrites: The hypocritical scribes and Pharisees wanted to make sure that everybody knew they were fasting, so they would have a sad countenance and disfigure their faces so their agony of fasting would be evident to all.- illustr- going on FB to declare your fast.

ii. Note: Being seen fasting and fasting to be seen are not the same

iii. Instead, Jesus says we should go out of our way to take good care of our bodies not to draw attention to our fasting

iv. This shows that this is a radically God-ward transaction, because most of the time God is the only one who knows and nobody else can be “impressed.”

v. Rewards: praise of men- **only**, or the “Father’s reward”

d. Principles regarding Christian fasting

i. We do not practice asceticism- suffering to earn favor with God

- ii. It is not manipulation, but preparation in our hearts to receive God's blessing- illustr- praying for a wife, but God prepared me first!
  - iii. Sometimes fasting was a preparation for revelation. Moses in the mountain fasted for forty days and forty nights (Exodus 24:15). Daniel fasted as he awaited God's word (Daniel 9:3). Jesus himself fasted as he awaited the ordeal of temptation (Matthew 4:2).
  - iv. In the O.T. it was often a sign of repentance (Joel 2:12-17)
  - v. Clearly, it is closely linked to prayer
  - vi. Fasting shows a desire for a breakthrough (important, significant advancement; overcoming) (demon in Mark 9-This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.)
  - vii. Breakthrough for ministry- Acts 13:2, 14:23
  - viii. Fasting is the abstaining from something that is usually good (i.e. food) to demonstrate and intensify our desire for something greater: namely God and His work in our lives! We would rather feast on Jesus the Bread of Life. Contrast: daily bread
  - ix. We are not ungrateful for the blessing of food, but we want the Father's reward! (feasting and fasting)
  - x. Prayer shows that we trust God, but fasting and praying is the ultimate declaration of dependence upon God
  - xi. Again, it is a means of God doing a work in our hearts to prepare us for His blessings
  - xii. Is not legalistic- the key is our heart and our passion for the Lord to work!
  - xiii. It is one passion driving out another passion
- e. God sees us fasting. He sees that we have a deep longing that is pulling us to fast. He sees that our heart is not seeking the ordinary pleasures life. He sees that we are acting not out of strength or discipline, but out of weakness to express to God our need and our great longing that he would act. And when he sees this, he responds. He acts.

- III. Applying this to our daily lives
- a. Every craving can be a reminder of our need to crave for God's presence
  - b. Fasting reveals our true selves- without being propped up by the good things in our lives (irritable, self-centered, etc.)
  - c. This is about significant, meaningful communion with God!
  - d. Quality time or Quantity of time? How about both?!
  - e. Fasting indicates our sincerity, and genuine consecration to God
  - f. Interceding for the lost/backslidden
    - i. We don't exchange our sacrifice to earn someone else's repentance
    - ii. We are truly passionate and burdened from the Lord
  - g. Revival- If we desire revival, we must examine where our passions lie and seek the Lord to change them!
  - h. Fasting is a way of saying with our stomachs what our hearts desire
  - i. It is an exclamation point at the end of the sentence, "I love you God, and I need you God!"

Conclusion:

- There's nothing magical about fasting. It's just one way of telling God that your priority at that moment is to be alone with him, sorting out whatever is necessary, and you have cancelled the meal, prior engagements or whatever else you had planned to do in order to fulfill that priority.
- This is about significant communion with God
- Prayer is a sweet fragrance and aroma to God. This is something that God loves! Let's demonstrate that we mean business for God and desire His work in our lives