



Sermon on the Mount *(Part 2)*

Matthew 6:1-34

First Presbyterian Church
Sunday Learning Community 2022-2023

- I would encourage you to follow along in your own Bible as we walk through these passages

Three Themes of Chapter 6

1) Piety (v. 1-18)

2) Treasure in Heaven (v. 19-24)

3) Trusting the Father (v. 25-34)

- An interesting note here as we walk through these passages is to look at shifts between singular and plural, and perhaps think about hearing this for the first time as a disciple

Avoiding Ostentation

¹"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

- Mat 6:1 ESV

Setting the framework:

The three examples of alms-giving, prayer and fasting are thus categorized as activities which God requires of his people. Jesus' quarrel is not with the doing of them—indeed he assumes that the disciple will do them—but with the manner and the motive. The manner to which he objects is “in front of other people,” i.e. publicly; the motive is “so that they will notice you,” i.e. aiming for human approval. Cf. 23:5–7 for a similar criticism of the scribes and Pharisees, using the same verb *theaomai* in 23:5.

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 234.

V1 In a society which values piety, as did first-century Judaism, people are more easily conned by religious ostentation

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 234.

It is perhaps most fittingly summed up in the formula of acceptance in 25:21, 23: “Enter into your master’s joy.” It is that reward which the disciples risk losing if they allow their allegiance to be diverted from their Father in heaven to their human contemporaries

Secret Almsgiving

²Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

⁴so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

- Mat 6:2-4 ESV

The general principle expressed in the plural in v. 1 is now more specifically applied to the practice of the individual disciple (see p. 230, n. 6). Giving to the poor was an important part of Jewish social life,

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 235.

- **v2 - Hypokritēs (the word originally meant a theatrical “actor”) is used by Matthew not only here in vv. 2, 5, 16 but also for a critic who does not criticize himself (7:5) and as a general term for those subject to ultimate judgment**

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 236.

In this passage there is no necessary allegation of deceit as such—they presumably did give alms, pray and fast; the problem was that they wanted everyone to know it. Rather these religious show-offs are “actors” in that they aim to impress others, but at the same time their behavior demonstrates how far they are out of touch with God’s understanding of “righteousness.”

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 237.

- **pray/fast”) the individual disciple’s action may be seen as falling within an agreed pattern of prayer or fasting undertaken by the community corporately, but how it is done is up to the individual, not for public awareness.**

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 237.

- **v4 - In the phrase “your Father” in Matthew the “your” is normally plural; only here and in vv. 6 and 18 is it singular, because the scene has been set up in terms of the individual disciple’s private relationship with God. That God “sees in secret” reflects the OT understanding that nothing is hidden from him**

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 237–238.

Secret Prayer

⁵"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

⁶But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

- Mat 6:5-6 ESV

The hope that other people will witness the public prayers of the “hypocrites” probably indicates that prayers were said aloud, not just that they were visibly engaged in prayer.

R. T. France, [The Gospel of Matthew](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 238.

The “most private room” is probably an inner store-room, which is likely to have been the only lockable room in an ordinary Palestinian house (the same term is used for a secret place in 24:26; Luke 12:3)

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 239.

The pattern prayer given in vv. 9–13 is worded in the plural, as a corporate rather than a private prayer, and gatherings for prayer together were a regular feature of the life of Jesus’ disciples from the beginning. The issue here is not the prayer but the motive.

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 239.

Further Teaching

⁷"And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

- Mat 6:7-8 ESV

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R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 239.

Their approach to prayer is characterized by two colorful terms, first

“babbling,” a noisy flow of sound without meaning, and polylogia, “much speaking,” “many words.” It is an approach to prayer which values quantity (and perhaps volume?) rather than quality. It is not necessarily purely mechanical, but rather obtrusive and unnecessary. It assumes that the purpose of prayer is first to demand God’s attention and then to inform him of needs he may have overlooked.

The reason why “you” (plural, the disciple community united in prayer) are not to be like them lies in a theology which attributes to God both the benevolent

concern of a Father and an omniscience which makes the prayer apparently unnecessary (cf. Isa 65:24: “Before they call, I will answer”). But if God does not need to be informed of our needs, why does he expect us to tell him about them? Christian spirituality has traditionally found the answer in a concept of prayer not as the communication of information, still less as a technique for getting things from God (the more words you put in the more results you get out), but as the expression of the relationship of trust which follows from knowing God as “Father.” The pattern prayer which follows illustrates how such a relationship works.

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 240–241.

The Prayer Pattern

⁹ Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,

¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

- Mat 6:9-13 ESV

Breaking down this section is more than we have time for (a bit like Pastor Bill putting a pin in Hebrews 11 earlier this year, but here are key things to keep in mind

The significantly shorter form in Luke 11:2–4 and the textual accretions following v. 13 here (see p. 231, n. 15) indicate a text which was in frequent use and thus subject to liturgical variation and expansion

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 241.

This balancing structure in itself speaks strongly against the "Gentile" view of prayer condemned in vv. 7–8. The first half of the prayer is concerned with God's honor, kingdom and purpose, and only after that do our own needs find a place. The first three clauses are cast in the form of wishes, using the third-person imperative form; they are in effect a doxology, an act of worship, associating the praying community with God's purpose in the world. The

overall priority of God's will rather than our desires.

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 243.

Thankfully, Jesus Himself offers some additional commentary on this pattern. I'm reminded of the disciples often asking him, 'Sooooo... what did that parable actually mean?'

Comment on the Lord's Prayer

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,

¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

- Mat 6:14-15 ESV

But if the disciple community which results from that mission is to be and to function as a community of the forgiven, its members cannot themselves begrudge forgiveness to others

R. T. France, [The Gospel of Matthew](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 252.

A second problem relates to the breadth of the forgiveness required. Its object is literally “people” without any further specification. So is there no limit to what and whom we must forgive? Should disciples forgive war criminals, serial murderers and abusers of children? What does “forgive” mean in such circumstances?

R. T. France, [The Gospel of Matthew](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 253.

While the reference to the offenses of “people” could hardly be more general, the clause of the prayer which these verses are explaining uses the metaphor of debt specifically of those who are indebted to us (v. 12). It is where there is personal offense that the concept of “forgiveness” properly applies. Those who

prayerful concern and (as far as possible) sympathetic understanding, but it is properly speaking not for us to “forgive” them: that is God’s prerogative. The concern of these verses, as of 18:21–35, is with the disciples’ response to those whose offense is against them. It is our own enemies whom we are to love (5:44).

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 253–254.

Secret Fasting

¹⁶ "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,

¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

- Mat 6:16-18 ESV

As with alms-giving and prayer, it is assumed that disciples will fast; the issue is not whether to do it but how. In a culture where few now give serious attention to fasting as a religious discipline (as opposed to token acts like giving up chocolates in Lent) this assumption causes surprise. In the NT as a whole there is little explicit instruction on fasting; it is simply mentioned occasionally (and never in the epistles) as something Christians sometimes did

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 254.

He simply comments on the familiar Jewish practice with the expectation that his disciples will continue it.

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 254.

But it is not until NT times that we find evidence of regular fasting by the Pharisees (9:14; twice a week according to Luke 18:12) and the disciples of John the Baptist (9:14). What had been a special provision for times of penitence or emergency had thus been turned into a matter of routine religious duty, despite the protest of Isa 58:3–7 against assuming that fasting had an automatic efficacy of its own

The sort of fasting envisaged here is presumably that of choice rather than of routine, since there would be little point in putting on a show to impress people with one's fasting if it was already known and expected

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 255.

Their “miserable” look was felt by some, then as now, to be a suitable expression of religious devotion

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 255.

Fasting, like alms-giving and prayer, is to be between the disciple and God. No-one else should know. (Perhaps that is why we know so little of early Christian practice in this regard!)

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 255.

When that prayer has been sincerely prayed, the disciple is set free from material anxiety and can instead concentrate on the kingship and righteousness of God (6:33) which are the prayer's primary focus. “Treasures on earth” and the demands of “mammon” are thus put into their proper place.

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 257–258.

Treasure in Heaven

¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,

²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light,

²³ but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

- Mat 6:19-24 ESV

19–20 The instruction “Do not store up for yourselves” might better be rendered “Stop storing up for yourselves”; this is a call to reorientation away from one type of acquisition to another

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 258.

while the theme of reward is important in this gospel, we must remind ourselves again that in the parable which most directly addresses the issue (20:1–15) there is a deliberate discrepancy between the effort expended and the recompense received: God does not leave anyone unfairly treated, but his grace is not limited to human deserving. In a kingdom in which the first are last and the last first (19:30; 20:16) there is no room for computing one’s “treasures in heaven” on the basis of earthly effort. Those treasures are “stored up” not by performing meritorious acts (and certainly not only by alms-giving) but by belonging to and living by the priorities of the kingdom of heaven.

The focus of this saying is on priorities: heaven rather than earth

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 259.

21 The singular “you”s and singular “treasure” of this verse suggest a separate

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 259.

22-23 The final comment then underlines how spiritually disoriented is a life which is not governed by those principles, but rather aims to amass and hold on to “treasure on earth”.

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 262.

24 The traditional translation “No one can serve two masters” is patently untrue; we do it all the time, whether by combining part-time jobs or by “moon-lighting.” But a slave was not employed under contract, but was normally wholly owned by the person who had bought him or her (though see Acts 16:16 for the possibility of joint ownership). It is that total commitment which Jesus uses to illustrate the demands of God’s kingship and to show the impossibility of combining those demands with the pursuit of “mammon.

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 262.

Jesus’ warning here is thus not specifically against ill-gotten wealth, but about possessions as such which, however neutral their character, can become a focus of concern and greed which competes for the disciples’ loyalty with God himself. The principle of materialism is in inevitable conflict with the kingship of God

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 263.

Trusting Your Heavenly Father

²⁵ Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,

²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

- Mat 6:25-32 ESV

while the subject-matter is familiar, the approach of this pericope is distinct and memorable, with its direct application to the most basic human needs and concerns, its insistent repetition of the term “worry” (six out of the seven Matthean uses of the verb are here), and its striking lessons drawn from God’s more than adequate provision for his natural creation

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 265.

25 The “therefore” suggests a connection with v. 24: those who accept the demand to be slaves of God rather than mammon might well wonder how their material needs are to be met if they have forgone the wealth that would provide for them

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 267.

But neither food nor clothing is an end in itself; it is the “life” and “body” for which they provide which ultimately matter, and it is those that the following verses will show to be the object also of God’s concern (as indeed they are the result of his creation

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New

God's kingship and righteousness

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 267.

Trusting Your Heavenly Father

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

³⁴ "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

- Mat 6:25-34 ESV

33 The language of priority which underlies vv. 19–21 and 24 is now again made explicit by the call to “make it your priority to find” (literally “seek first”) God’s kingship and righteousness

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 270.

In that case the idea of “seeking God’s kingship” is best understood as another way of saying the same thing, resolving to live under God’s direction and control, just as in 5:10 it is those who stand out for their pursuit of “righteousness” to whom the “kingdom of heaven” belongs. God’s kingship means God’s people living under God’s rule

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 271.

This is one of only five places where Matthew uses “kingdom of God” rather than “kingdom of heaven.” In each case it seems likely that he departs from his normal usage because the context requires a more “personal” reference to God himself rather than the more oblique language of his heavenly authority. In v. 32 we have heard of God as a “heavenly Father” who is personally concerned for his people, and a reference to “God’s kingship” follows naturally from this

R. T. France, [The Gospel of Matthew](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 271–272

of its first clause is fully consonant both with the summons not to worry about provisions in vv. 25–33 and also with the preceding petition for “bread for the coming day” in 6:11; once you have asked God for tomorrow’s needs there is no need to worry about them. But the following clauses speak not of God’s fatherly concern but, in a quite pragmatic way, of the pointlessness of anticipating tomorrow’s problems. Taken out of its current context this could, then, be read as simply a piece of cynical advice to live only for the present—the attitude condemned by Paul in 1 Cor 15:32 (following Isa 22:13; cf. 56:12), and indeed also by Jesus in Luke 12:19–20. In speaking of “tomorrow worrying” and of “troubles” as the likely experience of each day v. 34 strikes a more pessimistic (or at least realistic) note than the preceding verses. By including it along with vv. 25–33 Matthew has perhaps deliberately put a sobering question-mark against an unthinkingly euphoric attitude which vv. 25–33 might evoke in some hearers. God’s care and provision are assured, but that does not mean that the disciple life is to be one long picnic. Each day will still have its “troubles;” the preceding verses simply provide the assurance that by the grace of God they can be survived

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 272.

How

Three Themes of Chapter 6

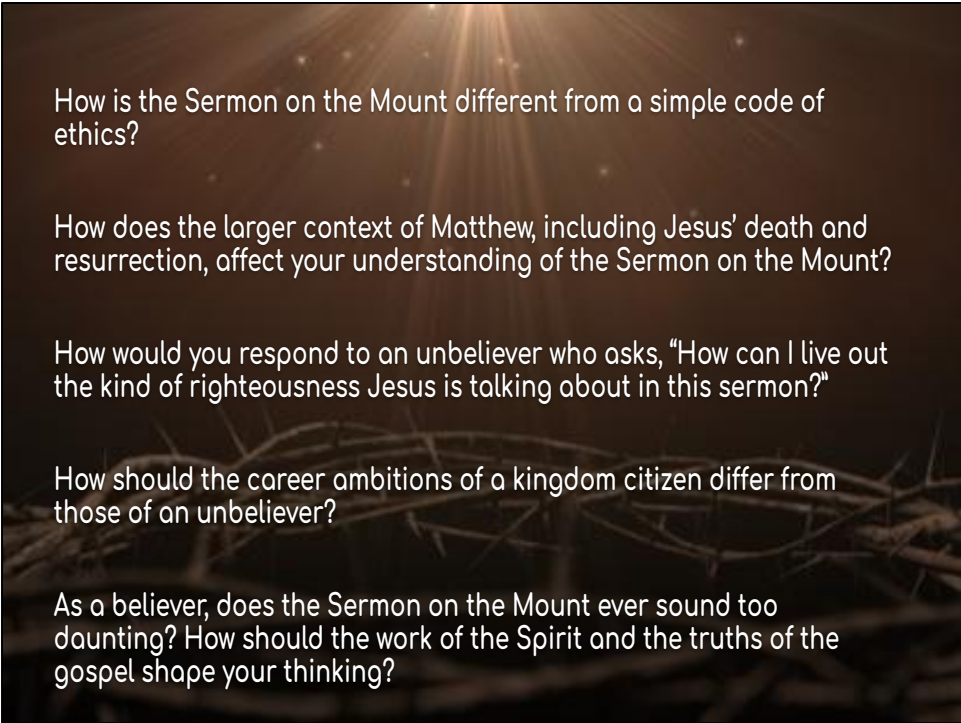
1) Piety

2) Treasure in Heaven

3) Trusting the Father

Reflect and Discuss

1. How is the Sermon on the Mount different from a simple code of ethics?
2. How does the larger context of Matthew, including Jesus' death and resurrection, affect your understanding of the Sermon on the Mount?
3. Explain what Jesus means when He says our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.
4. How would you respond to an unbeliever who asks, "How can I live out the kind of righteousness Jesus is talking about in this sermon?"
5. How should the career ambitions of a kingdom citizen differ from those of an unbeliever?
6. As a believer, does the Sermon on the Mount ever sound too daunting? How should the work of the Spirit and the truths of the gospel shape your thinking?
7. How does the close of this sermon speak to the uniqueness of Jesus?
8. We cannot see anyone's heart, but are there indications that someone is or is not a citizen of Christ's kingdom?
9. Is the Sermon on the Mount meant to be obeyed now, or is it a set of ideals only to be achieved in eternity? Explain your answer.
10. In what areas of your life are you failing to manifest a righteousness that differs from the world?



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