

The Gospel of the Kingdom Pt 13

Starting in Chapter 6, Jesus begins to talk about the development of Kingdom life in the real world.

He sets forth principles for Kingdom living in:

- religious life (6:1-18)
- everyday life (6:19-34)
- community relationships (7:1-12)

In this first section, Jesus gives examples of how a person's faith can be expressed in hypocritical ways when giving to the needy, when praying, and when fasting.

1. Giving to the Needy (Matt 6:1-4)

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.

2 "Thus, 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. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Public acts of obedience are valuable when you are modeling obedience and encouraging others to follow your example. However, when they are done for selfish motives, such as getting recognition, then you have already gotten your reward and you should not expect an "atta boy" from God.

I was recently reading about Mike Evans, the wide receiver for the Bucs who is a free agent, where a teammate was talking about how much charity work he does in the community that no one knows about because he doesn't brag about it. For a star receiver in the NFL he is not a diva like so many others, he is a humble man. Others, when they give to an organization, do it to have their picture taken handing someone a check so that it can then be put in the newspaper, a magazine, or some online story. I saw that a lot at Metropolitan Ministries when people would do these press conferences where they would hand our CEO these giant checks made from PVC board that showed how much they were giving. They were looking for publicity and since they got it, they've already gotten their reward.

People sometimes do the right things for the wrong reasons.

Are we called to give to the needy?

Of course we are. In fact, in the Vineyard, one of our values is "ministry with the poor". It's not about giving money or feeling good about yourself. It's about getting in the trenches with someone and seeing how you can work with them and encourage them beyond their immediate need.

Our goal is to show God's love in a practical way so that He gets the glory. Our reward is stored up in heaven where God sees it and treasures it.

2. The Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:5-15)

For the Jews, public prayers were a sign of religious piety. Prayers said aloud in the morning, noon and evening were common. To a certain extent, this was a good thing as it kept their relationship with God a central theme in their lives. It was a constant reminder to interrupt the daily routine and focus on God. In fact, we still see this today where hundreds of Jews gather at the wailing wall to pray in public.

However, for the Pharisees, who had set themselves up as the experts on the Law, they had to be seen as "holier than thou" and they prayed in public, not to talk to God, but to be seen and heard praying. They wanted to be known for their eloquence when they prayed.

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

Growing up in Puerto Rico our relatives, who were very religious would recite all these prayers that were taught to them by them in Church. In Spanish they would say "rezar" which is translated "recite". I on the other hand was taught to "orar" or pray.

Don't get me wrong, most of those prayers they recite are beautiful prayers. But most people, not all, have learned them by rote and they say them by rote and they lose their meaning. When my grandmother died, they had a group of women reciting the "Hail Mary" over and over again. They had to say it a certain number of times in order to pray her into heaven. That's where the Rosary comes in; you keep track of where you are by thumbing the beads on the Rosary. After a while is sounded sing-songy. How many times in a row can you recite something and really mean it. I like the way the King James translates this passage from the Greek, "**But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions**"

While Jesus isn't saying to never pray in public, He is instructing them on the fact the prayer is a personal and intimate conversation with God. As such, it should be an integral part of our private devotional time with Him.

It is important to understand that the "Lord's Prayer" is Jesus teaching us how to pray. This prayer is an outline for our prayer life. It is NOT meant to be recited as a substitute for actually praying to God.

He goes on to give a model of how to pray.

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.**

- Start your prayers by acknowledge that He is God and He is our Father. In the Greek the word for hallowed I think is better translated as "venerate". To venerate is to treat with great deference. Honor mingled with respect and awe.
- Then we acknowledge the here and the not yet of the Kingdom of God, that wherever someone calls on the name of Jesus, His rule and reign prevails.

11 Give us this day our daily bread,

- It is ok to ask God for provision, to provide for our needs. But as we see in the context of this prayer, it is only a small part of our conversation with Him. Now, there are times when we are in desperate need and this takes up a disproportionate part of our prayers, but let's not forget the other parts.

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

- If we expect forgiveness, then we have to be willing to forgive people who do us wrong. It's not about letting them off the hook, it is about following Christ's example and having a clear slate before Him.

13 And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

- We live in the here and not yet of the Kingdom of God. Regardless of the time frame, He is sovereign, which means He is in control. Satan can do nothing unless God allows it. Why does God allow certain things? I can't begin to comprehend the mind of God. It is enough for me to know that He is Holy, He is love, He's just and He is true. In this context, we know from Scripture that God sometimes allows Satan to tempt and test us. After his baptism, even Jesus was taken to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. So, knowing this, we can pray that He protect us when Satan comes asking permission to tempt us. We also know, that on those occasions when the devil is allowed to tempt us that,

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Cor 10:13)

Now for those of you who grew up in the Catholic Church or grew up with the KJV **(Later manuscripts add "For yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, amen.")** While this is a later addition, it is nonetheless a beautiful and correct way to end our prayers.

There is a story by the biographer of the famous Pentecostal Evangelist, Smith-Wigglesworth, that one day he picked him up from the train station and they were on their way to his house, when suddenly Smith-Wigglesworth asked him to pull over. Once

they stopped, he told him that it had been more than a half-hour since he last talked to Father.

We would do well to follow his example. We would do well to set reminders on our phones, so that we would stop at different parts of the day to have a conversation with God.

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.

This is so important, that Jesus reemphasizes this by repeating it. It is paramount that we forgive those who sin against us if we want God to forgive us.

3. Fasting (Matt 6:16-18)

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.

Fasting is not something that is required of us. It was required of the Jews at least once a year on the Day of Atonement.

Does that mean that we don't have to fast?

Matt 9:14-16

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" 15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

Jesus was saying that after He went back to heaven there would be a need for fasting.

While we don't have to fast, fasting is a private matter of the heart between the Christian and God. We fast as a way to humble ourselves before God by depriving ourselves of food, AND, focusing on God and bringing our petitions before Him.

As I've studied the Bible and walked with the Lord for all my life, I've discovered that there is a reason why the Bible talks about raising our hands, kneeling, bowing down, lying prostrate before God, and fasting. What I've seen is that the things we do in the natural have an effect in Spiritual. I don't know why, and I can't give you a one-on-one correlation, but I do know that they have an effect. At times, the presence of God is so powerful that it is even appropriate to take off one's shoes.

No, it is not about manipulating the Lord, it is a matter of expressing our reverence and awe for God. Again, it is not having to do these things, it is about getting to and wanting to do these things.