

THREE ESSENTIALS FOR GODLY LIVING

Matthew 6:16-24

Intro: If you are following our study of the Sermon on the Mount, you will notice by my text this morning that I am skipping over a few verses, and I want to explain why.

I concluded our study of the model prayer which our Lord gave without explaining the latter part of verse 13 where we read, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.” My reason for passing over this is because there is no evidence from the study of the best MSS we have that it was a part of what the Lord gave to His disciples. It certainly is a good way to end a prayer, but there is no evidence that the Lord said these words. Dr. A. T. Robertson, a thoroughly orthodox Greek scholar who was a professor of NT Greek at the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, and probably a Calvinist, made this comment in his commentary on Matthew:

The Doxology is placed in the margin of the Revised Version. It is wanting [lacking] in the oldest and best Greek manuscripts. The earliest forms vary very much, some shorter, some longer than the one in the Authorized Version [KJV]. The use of a doxology arose when this prayer began to be used as a liturgy to be recited or to be chanted in public worship. It was not an original part of the Model Prayer as given by Jesus (I, p. 55).

At least two times during his long and fruitful ministry did Charles Spurgeon speak just on Matthew 6:13, but he only dealt with the first part of the verse without making any reference to the latter part. He evidently understood that there were real questions as to the authenticity of the latter part.

But let me mention also verses 14 and 15. Actually I did refer to them in commenting on verse 12. Although verse 13 separates 12 from verses 14 and 15, our Lord seems to have added verses 14 and 15 to give further clarification to verse 12 – and He would have done this to show how very important verse 12 is. We need to be just as ready to forgive those who sin against us, as we are that the Lord forgive the sins which we have committed against Him.

So, if you are concerned about the latter part of verse 13, as well as verses 14 and 15, I hope this will satisfy you.

I have given my message for today the title, THREE ESSENTIALS FOR GODLY LIVING. In reading over verses 16 through 24 you might think that I am saying that to be godly you have to fast as well as pray. And that I am going to talking about money and how much value we put on it. That is partially true. And then in verses 22 and 24 the Lord spoke about the eye, but He got back in verse 24 to talking about money. Well my emphasis may vary from what you might expect, but I hope I can provoke some thought in all of our minds as to things we need to pay attention to if we are to be the people the Lord wants us to be.

I have mentioned to you many times that we are told at the beginning of chapter 5 that this message which the Lord gave, which is recorded in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, was given to our Lord's disciples. See Matt. 5:1-2.

I would also remind you that all of our Lord's original disciples were *Jews*. They had all been raised under the Law, and their primary teachers had been "the scribes and Pharisees." This meant that the scribes and Pharisees were not only their chief source of *truths that they were to believe*, but they were *their main examples as to how they were to live*. However, in this connection there was a major problem, and the Lord pointed out what this was in His denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees which we have in Matthew 23. There, in verses 2, 3, 4, and the beginning of verse 5, we read that the Lord said this both to "the multitude, and to His disciples" (Matt. 23:1):

2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:

3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men ... (Matt. 23: 2-5a).

To say that the scribes and Pharisees sat "in Moses' seat" meant that they were Moses' successors. Moses was the first great teacher that the children of Israel had, and the scribes and Pharisees claimed that they were the men who were appointed by God to carry on the teachings of Moses. But, as we have learned from the passage I read to you from Matthew 23, the Lord told the multitude of Jews and the disciples, all of whom had been raised under the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees, there was one major defect in their teaching, and it was really major. The Lord expressed it in these words which we find in Matt. 23:3:

3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. Much that the scribes and Pharisees taught was right and true. But where they failed was that they did not “practice what they preached.” How good it would be if all of us who teach the Word of God would remember this. We are not just *to teach* the truth, but we are *to live* the truth. But the Lord said that the scribes and Pharisees, in many respects, taught the truth, but they were not examples of what they taught. They said the truth, but they did not live the truth. How different the scribes and Pharisees were from the Apostle Paul who used to be one of them. Twice in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians he told the believers of Corinth to follow him in the way he was living just as he was seeking to follow Christ. See 1 Cor. 4:16 and 11:1.

What basically was the problem with the scribes and Pharisees? The Lord pointed out their problem in the first few words of Matt. 23:5 where we read, “But all their works they do to be seen of men.”

Now let us look at what the Lord said about fasting. And this brings me to the first point in my message today.

I. THE LORD’S MESSAGE REGARDING FASTING (Matt. 6:16-18).

In our Lord’s parable concerning the Pharisee and the publican who went up to the temple to pray, and he said that the Pharisee prayed like this: “I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.” And then he went on to praise himself with these words: “I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.” See Luke 18:11 and 12.

We have already learned in our Lord’s sermon that the Pharisees loved to pray in the synagogues and on the street corners where they could be seen of men. See Matt. 6:5. The Lord told His disciples that prayer was a personal and secret relationship that they had with the Lord, and their main place of prayer should be their closet.

Fasting was evidently very important to the Pharisees. The Bible does not require fasting. It is always voluntary, and it seems reserved for those times when we refrain from eating for a time in order to be able to spend the time in prayer that we would usually spend in eating.

Whether the Pharisees really fasted that often, or just said that they did, we don't know. But what we do know is that they wanted to appear to men as fasting. So it became a matter of pride to them. On the other hand David said this about fasting after telling the Lord how his enemies had returned evil to him although he had sought good for his enemies. This is what he said in Psa. 35:12-13:

12 They rewarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul.

13 But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom.

Fasting is to be a time when we humble ourselves before the Lord, not a time when we want to be seen by men so that we can brag about it.

This is exactly what our Lord said was their problem regarding fasting in Matt. 6:16. They wanted to look like they were fasting to the point of disfiguring their faces, "that they may appear unto men to fast." The scribes and Pharisees did what they did to be seen of men. And although they must have known the story of the prophet Samuel going to the house of Jesse where the Lord had told him that he would find among Jesse's sons Saul's successor, Samuel was ready to take the oldest son because he was tall and good looking. But the Lord rejected Eliab, saying, "The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

And so it is very possible to do the right thing in the wrong way. Although the scribes and Pharisees might fool people, they could not fool God. Their fasting brought divine judgment, not blessing, because it was all just an act to impress men, but not true fasting to please God.

And this brings me back to what I have said was probably the key verse in this whole message: Matt. 5:20:

20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

It is important, very important, that all of us understand this. We would think that the Lord is pleased with all of us this morning because we are here in a church service where prayer is offered, hymns are sung, the Word of God is read and proclaimed. But maybe some of you are here because you were forced to come. Or maybe you have been singing

hymns that you don't really believe, or that you haven't really been paying attention to the words. Our relationship with the Lord is the most important matter you and I will ever face in our lives. The scribes and the Pharisees were primarily men putting on a show before men. Our righteousness has to exceed attending church, giving, singing hymns, or even memorizing verses. We might be able to explain some of the great doctrines of Scripture, but if the truth we know has not changed our lives, we are in big trouble. How can we know that we are saved? Read 1 John and you will see it is by the lives we live. Our eternal salvation depends upon the reality of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is possible for a man to be the pastor of a church, and yet not be saved. A person can give his or her life on the mission field, and yet not be saved. I am not going to be in heaven some day because I am a graduate of a theological seminary, or because I have preached hundreds of sermons. I am going to be in heaven for the same reason that most of you will be in heaven, because the Lord Jesus Christ is my Savior, and I trust that my life shows that I truly am a child of God. Mere religion is not enough. The scribes and Pharisees were a very impressive group of men. They had plenty of power. But the Lord told His disciples and the multitudes of His day that if they didn't have more than the scribes and Pharisees, they would never see heaven.

So I believe that the main lesson in fasting, is that it be a time when we humble ourselves before the Lord, confessing our utter dependence upon Him, and seeking His mercy upon whatever situation we are facing that has driven us to our needs.

But I must hurry on to my second point:

II. OUR TREASURE (Matt. 6:19-21).

The Pharisee claimed that he gave tithes of all that he possessed. But in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it is recorded that the scribes and Pharisees devoured "widows' houses," and then tried to cover up what they were doing by making long prayers. Cf. Matt. 23:14; Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47.

We all need money, but our problem is that often we want more than we need. Making money consumes some people. It becomes their whole purpose in life. And yet as Solomon said, riches can take wings and fly away like an eagle into the heavens. These are his words found in Prov.

23:5: “Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.”

The Lord put His finger on one of the greatest, most consuming, of all of men’s sins: “the love of money.” Somehow money is connected with every form of evil. Think about that. Cf. 1 Tim 6:6-11:

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

11 But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote to the Colossian believers the words we find in Col. 3:1-4:

1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

All of this boils down to worldliness. Instead of separating ourselves from the world, the pressure is on us to dress like the world, to talk like the world, to listen to the world, and to think like the world. Worldliness has the church by the throat in our day, and until we shake it off and return to holy living, the church is going to remain impotent in a world that is madly rushing toward hell. May verses 1 and 2 of Romans 12 become our watchword – the sign by which we who really know the Lord recognize each other as members of the family of God.

But I have two verses left, and they have to do with two very small members of our bodies:

III. THE EYE (Matt. 6:22-23).

Now I am simple enough to believe that when the Lord spoke here of “the eye,” He was talking about “the eye.” We all have two of them. With some of us they may not be as good as they used to be, but they can still be great instruments of blessing, or great instruments for trouble.

The Devil is exploiting us today by the way he appeals to our eyes as never before. What is it to have a “single” eye? This does not mean just to have one eye. It seems that verse 24 gives us an idea of the difference between a single eye and an evil eye. A single eye is an eye that is turned primarily to all that pleases God. An evil eye is an eye that is set upon the sins of the world to the point that those sins begin to consume us. A single eye is continually feasting upon the Word of God, and it is concerned about the glory of God. The first sin, the sin of Eve, was committed because she saw the forbidden fruit in the light of what it could mean to her instead of seeing it as a forbidden fruit which could only result in death.

Some time make a study of what the Bible says about the eye, and then ask God to give you a single eye.

Concl: So what are the three essentials of godly living in our text for today? The first is the desire to live to please God, not men. The second is to be heavenly minded, not worldly. The third is spiritual eye care, making sure that we are single eyed, looking at God through His Word, and feeding our souls on the Word rather than all of the sin that surrounds us continually in this evil world.

What the Jews were learning from the scribes and Pharisees was to be satisfied by acting the part, to pretend to live one way while actually being the very opposite. What the Lord was seeking to teach them was the true way to please God and to have the blessing of God upon our lives every day by putting God first, godliness second, and spiritual eye care close behind.