

All That Jesus Taught Bible Study - Part 23

by Zac Poonen

Jesus teaches us to correct wrong attitudes such as seeking honor from men and loving money, and to trust God's provision and set our hearts on heavenly things.

Duration: 25:24

Scripture: Matthew 6:1

Topics: "Humility In Worship", "Stewardship Of Wealth"

Description

This sermon delves into the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 6, focusing on the importance of maintaining a humble and sincere attitude in our religious practices such as giving, praying, and fasting. It emphasizes the need to avoid seeking honor from men and to keep our acts of devotion private, allowing God to reward us. The sermon also addresses the dangers of loving money, highlighting that serving both God and money is impossible, and that loving money ultimately leads to hating God.

Transcript

We continue our study today on all that Jesus taught. We've been looking at the commands of Jesus which he told us to teach every disciple in every nation to do. And this we have been seeing is the neglected aspect of the Great Commission in Matthew 28-20.

So we've been looking at Matthew 4, 5 and 6 and today we come to Matthew 6 and verse 16. In the first 18 verses of Matthew 6, we have a wrong attitude that Jesus was trying to correct. And that was the attitude of seeking honor from men for our religious activities.

He first spoke about giving, then about praying, and then about fasting. And in this three verses 16-18, he's talking about fasting. The same principle is in prayer.

When you fast, do it in secret. Don't be like the hypocrites who neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. They have their reward in full.

But when you fast, anoint your head, wash your face, so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but your father who is in secret. Notice these three areas. There are three areas where a lot of Christians like to secretly boast about what they have done for the Lord.

Many would like to know, others to know, many would like others to know the sacrifices they have made in terms of money, etc., that they've given to God. Jesus said, keep it secret. Let God reward you in the final

day.

Many would like others to know how much they pray. For example, you read in biographies of people that so-and-so would spend two hours in prayer every day or four hours in prayer every day. Well, how did they know? How did anybody know he was doing that if he was praying in secret? He shouldn't have let anybody know that he was praying.

He probably couldn't avoid his family members knowing. But otherwise, nobody else should know how much a person prays. He should tell his family members not to tell anyone.

How in the world will anybody know if you follow those principles how much you pray in secret? It's completely violated. You read biographies of such people, very often you just get discouraged. The Bible doesn't tell you to pray for two hours or four hours.

It just tells you to pray always. Luke 18, verse 1, and 1 Thessalonians 5, 17 says, without ceasing. So these are human rules that are propagated by men.

And a lot of people who don't know the scriptures begin to admire these and follow them. If you pray, don't let anybody know how long you pray for or anything concerning your prayer. If you give, don't let anybody know how much you give.

And in this area of fasting, perhaps more than in praying and giving, I've heard numerous people tell others they fasted for seven days or 21 days or 40 days or whatever it is. And I don't see the purpose of it. To me, it's outright disobedience to the word of God, which says you should never let anybody know how long you fasted.

Even if you fasted from one meal or you fasted for 40 days, don't let anybody know. Jesus said that so clearly. And yet it is thoroughly disobeyed by almost everybody who fasts.

I presume there are very few people on earth who fast without anybody knowing about it. But those are the ones who get a reward from God. Notice this expression that comes repeatedly in all these three instances of giving, praying and fasting.

Your father, first of all, in verse 4 of Matthew 6, your father who sees in secret will repay you. And again, concerning prayer in verse 6, your father who sees you praying in secret will repay you. Your father who sees you giving in secret praying in secret and verse 18, your father who sees you fasting in secret will repay you.

People will see in your life the result of your secret activities in these three areas. There's no need for you to advertise them. When you advertise them, you are seeking your own honor and glory.

The very thing that Jesus said we should avoid. And that's the reason why I have zero respect for people who tell me how long they pray for or how much they give or how much they fast. I don't respect them because they are disobeying the command of God openly.

And I don't think you should respect any such man because he's disobeying God's command. If somebody tells you how long he fasted, remind him that Jesus said we're not supposed to tell anyone how long we fasted. What is the purpose of fasting? All of us have a tremendous love for food.

There's no doubt about it. Every human being loves it. And it's very easy for food to become our God.

In fact, in Philippians chapter 3, it speaks about certain people whose God is their appetite. Philippians 3 verse 19. And they are called in verse 18, enemies of the cross of Christ.

Who are the enemies of the cross of Christ? Those whose God is their appetite, your idol. Food can be your idol that replaces God and where that becomes so essential in your life. And fasting breaks that slavery to food, one thing.

The other thing with fasting helps us in it. I mean, if you fast even for two days without food, that's the first time you really understand what hungry people in the world feel like. I never knew what hungry people felt like till I fasted.

And you won't know what hungry people feel like till you fast. And that's another purpose of fasting. And it detaches us, helps us to concentrate more in the things that we are particularly praying about.

Very often prayer is coupled with fasting. And usually when you have to take some momentous decision, it's good to concentrate and maybe take a day off from work and fast and seek God in prayer. It doesn't mean you have to be on your knees all the time or sometimes you can even go to work.

While fasting, it's a very good habit to do as a discipline. I believe that all godly men give, pray and fast. A person who is spiritual will always give, pray and fast in secret.

And the person who does not do these three should not consider himself to be a very spiritual person at all. So the important thing in all these areas is to do it in secret. And after this, now we come to another very important area.

Another wrong attitude. We've seen the wrong attitudes in verse 21 to 26 of chapter 5, anger. Another wrong attitude in verse 27 to 32, sinful sexual desire.

Another wrong attitude in verses 33 to 37, lying. And another wrong attitude in Matthew 5, verse 38 to 42, revenge. Another wrong attitude in Matthew 5, verse 43 to 48, hatred.

So there we have five wrong attitudes. And then here's the sixth one, seeking the honor of men, chapter 6, verse 1 to 18. And here's a seventh one, a wrong attitude is the love of money.

This is the subject in verse 19 to 24 of chapter 6. Now, many people don't think of the love of money as the wrong attitude. To have money is not a sin. To love money is a sin.

It's very clear. Jesus spoke quite a bit about it. He said, don't lay up for yourself treasure upon earth, where moth and rust will destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

But lay up for yourself treasure in heaven, where no moth or rust destroys and where thieves cannot break in and steal. The reason is because where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Now, it's very easy to understand whether we have obeyed that command or not.

If your mind is thinking more about earthly things than heavenly things, and your earthly assets and property more than heavenly things, you can be pretty sure that your heart is here on this earth and your treasure is also here. The way to know whether we have obeyed this command is to ask ourselves during the day, where is our heart set in the middle of our work and everything else? If we're terribly disturbed because of a little financial loss or excited because of a financial gain, that would indicate that our treasure is on this earth. I remember many years ago when somebody gave me a small financial gift and the Lord

asked me a question.

Has your joy increased? And I suddenly felt convicted. I said, Lord, I'm sorry to confess. Yes, my joy has increased, but I got because I got this little money.

And I learned that day that I must rejoice only in the Lord and not in money. And I learned that increase of money should never increase my joy. If it does increase my joy, it means my joy is in money.

The Bible says rejoice in the Lord always and the Lord is always the same. So if you gain money or lose money, your joy in the Lord does not increase or decrease. It's the same.

If your joy decreases because you lost some money, you can be pretty sure your heart was there. If your joy increases because you got some money, you can be pretty sure your heart was there. We must trust God that he will provide all that we need for our earthly life.

But we must not find our joy in these earthly things. We can use these earthly things, but not find our joy in them. Money is a wonderful servant, but it's a terrible master.

It's like fire. Fire is a wonderful servant, but a terrible master. We cannot live without fire in our houses.

How do you cook food without a fire? But if that fire in the stove becomes a master, that means the house is burnt up. It's a terrible master burning down your whole house. But if you keep it under control, you turn down the knob and say, well, you fire, I'm going to control you.

When I turn you on and turn you off in the stove, I'm going to decide that, not you. You're not going to take over the house. Then it's a wonderful servant.

Money must be like that. We need fire and we need money to live on this earth, but it must be your servant. You must say, money, I'm going to decide.

You're not going to control me. I'm going to control you. You're not going to control my mind and make you think about, make me think about you all the time.

I'm going to think about the Lord and the things of heaven, but I'm going to use you. That's the position of a spiritual man. Gold is a very good thing if it's used as a servant.

The Bible says there's gold in heaven, but where is it in heaven? That's the difference between earth and heaven. On earth, people put gold on their heads as crowns and around their necks. In heaven, we read the streets are of gold.

That means you walk on them. You put them under your feet. That's the difference between a heavenly man and an earthly minded Christian.

A heavenly minded Christian has got gold under his feet. He does not rule him. A carnal Christian has got gold on his head.

It's in his mind all the time. So if money is on your mind all the time, you love it, whether you like it or not. It's like a boy who loves a girl and he's always thinking about her.

And the one who's always thinking about money, he's in love with money. And the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil. Now, you don't have to be a rich man to love money.

I've never seen a beggar in India who doesn't love money. The beggars on the street, every one of them love money. Nowadays, if you give them 50 paisa in their hand, they despise it.

They love money. They want more. So it's not wealth that makes a man love money.

Some people, you think someone is rich that he must be loving money. What about that poor beggar? He loves money too. You can imagine yourself to be poor and that you don't love money.

Poor people love money too, just as much as rich people. At the same time, you can be free from money, irrespective of how much wealth you have. It's a question of your attitude towards it.

If you have one servant in your home and he takes over your house, that would be terrible. You can have a little money. That's like having one servant.

But he's taken over your house and he rules your thinking. On the other hand, you could have 318 servants like Abraham had. But they were all his servants.

They obeyed him. And you can have a lot of money. And you say, well, you're going to listen to me.

I'm going to determine how I use you for the glory of God. So the love of money is the root of all evil. Not plenty of money is the root of all evil.

It's very important to understand this distinction. I've seen a lot of poor people who love money tremendously. And I've seen rich people who don't love it.

So I've seen through my life that it's not a question of how much you have, but what you love. That's what Jesus was speaking about. Your mind must be set on the things above.

Lay up treasure in heaven. And the way to know it is, what are you thinking of? Where's your heart? What are you in love with? And then he goes on to speak about the eye in relation to money in verse 22. The lamp of the body is eyes.

If the eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. That means it's a question of how you look at money. That's the thing.

If your eye is bad, that means you look at it as something very important. Most important for your life on earth. Your body will be full of darkness.

And if the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness? It's amazing how many people who got all their doctrines right, and who are good Christians, and in the eyes of others, who go to church services regularly, who got their doctrines right, who look down on other dead denominations, they love money tremendously. And sometimes it's those people in those dead denominations who are more free from the love of money than many who claim to be in New Testament pattern churches, who love money immensely. It means a lot to them.

So ask yourself some fundamental questions like this. Do you get excited when you get a little more money? Then you love it. Do you get depressed when you lose it? Then you love money.

Our joy must be completely unaffected, will be completely unaffected, if it is in the Lord alone. If it is not in the Lord, but in earthly things, then it will be affected by our income going up or down, or when we suffer a

loss. Then he went on to make a tremendously important statement in Matthew 6 in verse 24.

Remember, this is one of the wrong attitudes to have. It's as wrong as having a revenge or hatred, or seeking the honor of men, all these other things that we spoke about earlier, telling lies. The love of money is in the same category as taking revenge, hatred, telling lies, lusting after women, anger.

It's in the same category. One more wrong attitude to love money. And then Jesus says in verse 24, no one can serve two masters.

Either he will hate the one and love the other, Matthew 6, 24, or he will hold on to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. The two masters are not God and the devil.

There is no Christian who feels that he can serve God and the devil. No Christian has such a crazy idea. No Christian loves the devil.

Nobody. But the two masters are not God and Satan. The two masters are God and money.

And there are a lot of Christians who think they can love God and love money, who don't think they can love God and Satan, but they do think they can love God and money. But Jesus demolished that idea and said you cannot do it. There are people who think they can serve God and serve money.

You cannot do it. And this is so important in our day where we find so many Christian leaders and preachers who are always asking people to give money to their ministry. And a lot of that money that goes into their ministry goes to enable this great preacher to live a very luxurious lifestyle ten times better than the people who are giving him money.

That's a crime. That if people on earth don't judge it, God will severely judge such people in the final day. Can you imagine Jesus taking money from poor people and living at a much higher standard than them himself? Is that the Jesus you see in scripture? Far from it.

Jesus would not take money from poor people and live at a higher standard himself. There are many today, however, who call themselves servants of God who take money from poor believers and live in a luxurious lifestyle themselves. That is a crime of the first order.

And if Jesus were here, he would take a whip and chase such people right outside the church. He would say, listen, if you want to make money, go out and do business somewhere else. Go and do some other work.

Earn as much as you can and do what you like. But don't take money in God's name from people who give for God's work and use it to live luxuriously. God has ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

That's written very clearly in 1 Corinthians 9. And many people misuse that verse. 1 Corinthians 9, verse 14 says, the Lord has directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. It's right for those who preach the gospel to receive gifts, to take care of their earthly needs.

But the Lord has not directed that those who proclaim the gospel should live luxuriously from the gospel. That he hasn't directed. That is the result of the covetousness of preachers.

And we see plenty of examples of that in Christendom today who misuse that verse and live at a far higher standard of life than the people who support them. So there is an example of the danger that Jesus spoke about thinking that you can serve God and serve money. And I want to tell you, as I see it, and I'm not afraid to say this, that most preachers nowadays, particularly a lot of them on television, they are not serving God.

They're serving money. Why is it that so many people who claim to be able to do miracles and healings in big, you know, stadiums and on television say God can do anything. It's quite hilarious when I look at it and hear them.

God can do anything. He can open blind eyes, they say. He can raise the dead, they say.

He can open deaf ears. He can cleanse the leper. He can heal the sick.

He can do everything. He can do any miracle. He can do all types of things for you.

There's only one miracle God cannot do. He cannot give me money for my needs. So you people have got to do that.

You see what a joke the whole thing is? Is that the only thing that God cannot do? Is that a miracle God cannot do? The Lord says the silver and the gold in all the universe is His. The cattle on a thousand hills are His, it says in the Psalms. He says, if I were hungry, I wouldn't tell you.

This billionaire ruler of the universe, we claim to be his servants. Why do we go begging to people for money? No servant can serve two masters. If you cannot trust your heavenly father to meet your needs, stop serving him.

Go and do some earthly business. No one can serve two masters. It says either he will hate the one and love the other.

It's quite a radical thing He says here. Like He speaks about hating father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters in Luke 14, 26. Jesus was radical.

What is He saying here in Matthew 6, 24? If you want to love God, you got to hate money. That's a pretty strong statement. Do you get that interpretation from Matthew 6, 24? I certainly do.

Mammon refers to money, real estate, stocks and shares, earthly things. And He says, if you want to love God, you got to hate all of that. You can use it.

But your love for God must be so supreme, like the brightness of the sun, that your interest in money disappears when you love God like the stars disappear in daylight. Now, if it is not like that, you cannot serve God. It is impossible.

You cannot serve. And the other thing He says here is, if you hold on to one, you despise the other. So put the word God and mammon into that sentence.

And this is how it reads. No one can serve God and material things, a material wealth, money. Either he will hate money and love God or he will hate God and love money.

Now, the implication of what Jesus is saying is that anyone who loves money hates God. Now, you may not have known it, but you know it today. Jesus is saying that if you love money, you hate God, whether you know it or not.

You may think you love God just because you sing a lot of songs to Him, but that's not what He says. It's not true. And the other thing He says is, if you hold on to God, you will despise money.

If you hold on to money, you despise God. It is so important. You can have money.

You can earn money. But the moment you begin to love it, you begin to hate God. You can earn as much as you like.

May God may have given you a good job or an inheritance where you have a lot of money. That's fine. But if you love it and you hold on to it, you despise God and you hate God.

It's so important for us to understand and to have a right attitude in this if we want to serve the Lord faithfully. In Luke chapter 16, Jesus said, the reason why many people don't have spiritual riches. Here it is.

Luke chapter 16 and verse 11. If you are not faithful in the use of unrighteous mammon, who will entrust the true riches to you? The true riches are revelation in God's word, likeness to Christ, anointing of the Holy Spirit, partaking of God's nature. Why is it we find so few Christians manifesting the likeness of Christ and getting revelation from God's word and having a rich anointing of the Holy Spirit? One reason.

They are not faithful with mammon. That's the reason for all the boring sermons that we hear in churches and all the unfaithfulness that we see in Christian workers. So it's a very, very important area.

It is an alternate master to God. And if you want to have a right attitude to God, you must keep money in its proper place as a servant under your feet. Let's pray that that'll happen in our lives.

Heavenly Father, help us to be extremely careful in this area of tremendous danger in this time in which we live. Help us to be honest and true in our attitude towards this before you and to seek to be freed by your power from the grip that mammon has over us. We ask in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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