

Sermon on the Mount—Alms, Prayer, Fasting

Matthew 6:1—18

The Pharisees and other leaders of Israel were proud of their position over the people. They presented themselves as righteous by their external actions. Jesus knew that men looked up to the Pharisees and other leaders when He told the people that they would need to be even more righteous than the Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20).

Christ, however, knew that the Pharisees only appeared righteous but He knew what they were like on the inside. This is why He often pointed out that the Scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites, looking good on the outside while putrid inside.

Matthew 23:27—28 ²⁷ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. ²⁸ Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

This is why Jesus spent time tearing down the leaders in front of the people. The people looked up to them, but Christ needed them to see who they really were and to turn away from them and turn to their Messiah. Jesus continually contrasts the external with the internal. Only those who are right internally will gain entrance into the Kingdom and this is possible only through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christ now points out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in three areas; giving of alms, praying and fasting. There is a common thread running through this section, that of the Pharisees looking for public praise of men while the Little Flock is told to wait for the praise of God. The Pharisees' righteousness was not a true righteousness. Publically they appeared to be righteous but a self-made righteousness is inadequate. If Israel expected to gain entrance into the Kingdom then they would need to not only be righteous on the outside (like the Pharisees appeared) but they would also need to be righteous on the inside. This change of heart can only come from God.

Alms (verses 1—4)

Alms is what is given to the poor. The Mosaic Law made provision for the poor by commanding landholders to not harvest the edges of the field so the poor could reap the produce. This provision for the poor would not be needed if Israel had obeyed God from the beginning. It was only because they strayed that there were those in need because God had intended to supply all their need had they followed Him.

Deuteronomy 15:4—5 ⁴ Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it:

⁵ Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day.

The rich leaders were proud of their much giving. They made sure everyone knew how much and how often they gave. The problem was that their heart was corrupt. They acted righteously on the outside but it was all done for their own glory before men. As verse 5 puts it, they have their reward in full. It was this praise of men that constituted their full reward. This is significant because Christ promised the reward of the Kingdom to the believing remnant (Matthew 5:12; Luke 6:35). The only problem is that they would have to wait for their reward until the Second Coming at which time Christ will reward them richly. There is only one reward and that comes either from man or God but not both.

Isaiah 40:10 Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him And His recompense before Him.

Revelation 22:12 "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.

Notice from verse four that the Father sees them in secret and those who give in secret will be rewarded openly. We'll come back to this later on.

Prayer (verses 5—15)

As in the giving of alms, the leaders of the synagogue would pray very publically with fancy prayers that impressed the common man with how eloquent they were. In contrast to this Christ tells the Little Flock to pray in private. The leaders with their public prayers were again rewarded with the praise of the people while the ones who would secret themselves away will be rewarded when Christ comes in His glory.

One of the reasons that prayer will be in secret is the Tribulation. The remnant of Jewish believers will be hidden away and protected seen only by the Father. Notice that the Father is also again portrayed as being in secret.

The prayer the Lord gives is a sample prayer that should more accurately be called the disciple's prayer. This is the prayer that will be prayed during the Tribulation. It is not a prayer that is to be repeated endlessly by rote. Too many churches today use this prayer in defiance of Christ's clear teaching not to use vain repetition. This is another tradition of man that is contrary to Scripture.

Fasting (verses 16—18)

The leaders again bring honor to themselves through fasting. While fasting they would make themselves look like they hadn't eaten for days. I wouldn't be surprised if they actually ate something while they said they were fasting. Again, it was all for show. The outside seemed righteous but the inside was a rotting mess. They were trading the praise of men for the praise of God, accepting a temporal reward in place of an eternal reward.

The righteous remnant were to do the opposite. They were giving up the rewards of this life so they could enjoy the Kingdom. What they did in secret was seen by the Father who again was Himself in secret.

The Father in Secret

Three times it was said that the Father was in secret (Verses 4, 6 and 18). It's important in order to fully understand these verses that these verses are not simply saying that the Father is in heaven, unseen but that He is actually in secret. A little history should help us understand what is being said.

Israel was formed by God to be the people through whom He would reveal Himself. He also wanted to dwell with Israel so that He would be their God and Israel would be His people. The Temple that was built by Solomon was to be the place where God would dwell. We can see in Ezekiel that the glory of God was in that temple.

Exodus 15:13 Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation.

Ezekiel 8: 4 And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision that I saw in the plain.

However, Israel brought in idols and turned her back on God (Ezekiel 8:9—10, 16). The next few chapters of Ezekiel tell the sad story of God leaving the temple first from the cherub to the threshold of the temple (10:4), then from the threshold of the temple to the entrance of the east gate (10:18, 19), then went to the mountain to the east of the city (11:23). God's glory has yet to return to Israel.

Israel must wait until the Second Coming before God will again dwell with her. The Millennial temple is described in Ezekiel beginning with chapter 40 and finally in Ezekiel 43 the glory of God comes back to the temple.

Ezekiel 43:4—7 ⁴And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. ⁵So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house. ⁶And I heard him speaking unto me out of the house; and the man stood by me. ⁷And he said unto me, Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and my holy name, shall the house of Israel no more defile, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoredom, nor by the carcasses of their kings in their high places.

Ezekiel 48:35 It was round about eighteen thousand measures: and the name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there.

The next lesson we will expand on God hiding His face from Israel during a very specific time.

For previous notes and additional mid-Acts materials please visit www.MidActsTruths.com