

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 19, Chapter 6

Our duty, and our hope, as followers of the Messiah Yeshua is to place our feet into His footprints. The Sermon on the Mount is showing us the way. Matthew recognizes how crucial Yeshua's speech is and so takes 3 full chapters to record it, and we've completed only the first, which is chapter 5. So today we begin Matthew chapter 6. Open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 6.

READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 6 all

Verse 1 sets up the basic theme for the next several verses: motive. That is, why we choose to do the things we do. The last half of the previous chapter (chapter 5), starting at verse 21, dealt with intent. A contrast is set up there, and here to begin chapter 6, between the deeds and acts we do outwardly versus what we harbor in our minds. And what we find is that what we think inwardly has everything to do with how God sees and rewards us, including for the things we do outwardly based on our motive for doing them. Paul picks up on this principle of the inward versus the outward in Romans chapter 2 that injects this principle even into the matter of our spiritual identity before the Lord. That is, despite what we might display or want to project superficially, it's what on the inside that counts most.

CJB Romans 2:28-29 ²⁸ For the real Jew is not merely Jewish outwardly: true circumcision is not only external and physical. ²⁹ On the contrary, the real Jew is one inwardly; and true circumcision is of the heart, spiritual not literal; so that his praise comes not from other people but from God.

So even before we begin to delve deeper into what follows in Matthew 6, we

understand the enormous value that God places on motive and intent. Sometimes Christianity will use the term "heart" to mean our motive and intent. Motive and intent are perhaps greater than the deed itself to the point that doing a positive deed with an evil intent is a greater sin than doing a negative deed but having a righteous intent (even if misguided in carrying it out). Let me say this another way because I get questions nearly daily about how to live a Torah directed lifestyle from people wanting to know specific do's and don'ts in various situations they find themselves. Having a righteous intent (and I define that as having a sincere intent to obey God as based upon His biblical commandments and not on our own feelings, emotions, and sense of justice) but then our deed winds up causing harm or offense is either not a sin or the sin is treated by God with great mercy. However no matter how great a good that a deed might be, without the intent to obey and the motive to please God, but rather it is done with the intent to draw praise and recognition to ourselves, that is always a sin.

Verse 1, according to the CJB, speaks of doing acts of ***tzedakah***. Although that Hebrew word is not there, David Stern is correct in assuming that this must necessarily be the Hebrew word that is in Matthew's mind as He is writing His Gospel. What we find in the Greek Bible manuscripts is an attempted translation of it: ***dikaioisune***. It means righteousness in the sense of justice. And that's fairly close to the mark. Literally ***tzedakah*** means righteousness. However its usage in Hebrew culture and language actually meant "doing righteousness". It is a verb; it is an action that expresses doing a deed that more often than not was directly connected to giving, whether it was a tithe or an act of charity. Therefore the subject is righteous giving. Christ next follows-up with some examples and instructions about exactly how to do that.

The first instruction is to not perform these acts of righteous giving in order to get personal recognition or credit from people. Planned or spontaneous giving has always been part of Hebrew society and the sincerely pious generally made it the highest priority. But, we find in all eras that people will have ulterior motives for giving, among which is praise from others and the outward appearance of piety for purely personal benefit. Thus they expect to be publicly recognized and admired, maybe even given honorary status, when their giving occurs. Jesus's response to this is that while they may well receive what they'll hoping for from their fellow man, they will receive nothing further from their Father in Heaven for giving with such a wrong attitude. Motive. Intent. The deed itself was good, the intent was wrong, and so a potentially good thing in the eyes of God was turned into sin. Yeshua is cautioning His listeners that there is a stark difference that

centers on the giver of the rewards; it is between the rewards we receive from our fellow man versus rewards from Heaven.

I want you to pay attention to the fact that Christ is going to emphasize The Father in the next several verses. That is, despite the implication within some branches of the Church that the Father has taken a long vacation and turned everything over to His Son, Yeshua dispels it all. It is not He, Jesus, who determines and rewards; it is The Father.

Verse 2 begins with, "so when you do ***tzedakah***....." This time the Greek word chosen to translate it is ***eleemosune*** and it refers directly to the giving of mercy in the sense of alms... charity to the needy. In Christ's day, other than what was given to the Temple for offerings and tithes, when giving to the Synagogue the money was used mostly for caring for the needy. No doubt some was kept for upkeep and other legitimate expenses. At other times money was given directly by people to some of the thousands of licensed beggars who often congregated in certain places where there was lots of foot traffic. And Yeshua says when someone makes a contribution trumpets shouldn't be blown (for the purpose of drawing the crowd's attention to the giver).

A question often debated among Theologians and especially among Bible historians is if this trumpet blowing was literal or if Yeshua used it metaphorically. To date no Jewish document has been found to confirm that the blowing of trumpets upon giving actually occurred in Jewish society. However since Christ did say it, and there is no record of a standard Jewish expression of "blowing a trumpet" (that would mean to try to gain recognition) then likely it did happen occasionally. Yeshua had observed it and it upset Him, and so He used it as a rather blatant example of what NOT to do when giving alms. I actually saw this in action in a Synagogue that I visited some years ago. They had an offering time and up on an elevated stage a bucket was placed for givers to get up out of their seats, walk up to the front of the congregation and put their money into it. Each time someone dropped their donation into the bucket, a trumpet was loudly blown and the congregation applauded. What bothered me all the more was that this was a Messianic Synagogue; a Synagogue of Believers. I can only suppose the Rabbi never read this passage in Matthew 6. I've also seen techniques used by the Church to give recognition so that congregation members would be most conspicuous if they did NOT give. It goes without saying that anything along the lines of what I just told you goes against the spirit of the instruction that Christ uttered in this verse.

Yeshua calls those that give in order to seek personal recognition from their fellow Jews, hypocrites. While the Greek term is *hypokrites*, and it literally refers to an actor who wears a mask as he plays a role in the theater, the overall idea is of someone who is pretending to be something he isn't. Notice that Christ says it is at the synagogues and in the streets where this practice occurs of making sure one gets public recognition for giving charity to the poor. Thus the person doing it is disguising his evil heart by doing something that looks wonderful and pious on the surface. Jesus isn't advocating anything different than the norm. We have much written evidence in the ancient Jewish writings of the same thought. For instance in the Talmudic tractate Bava Batra, Rabbi Eleazar is quoted as saying: **"A man who gives charity in secret is greater than Moses our teacher"**. In another passage from that same document we find: **"Charity (tzedakah) saves from death if the giver does not know to whom he is giving and the receiver does not know from whom he receives."**

Thus Yeshua says that the only reward that the hypocrite will receive is the one he already has..... the admiration of those he preferred.... those who looked on as he gave.

In verse 3 the crowd is told not to let their left hand know what their right hand is doing. If this was a saying of the time, here in New Testament is the only Jewish document ever found that contains it. So it may be a unique saying of Jesus. In trying to understand the actual meaning as this would have expressed to a crowd of 1st century Jews, we need to look to Jewish culture (and most Middle Eastern culture of that era) whereby the right hand was perceived as the strong hand... the best hand; it was the dominant and authoritative hand both symbolically and actually (left hand dominant people were a rarity). Therefore the idea seems to be that there is no need for other parts of one's body to know what the hand of authority (the right hand) is doing (giving to charity). The left hand has no right to question the actions of the right hand or to even know about it. This way the giving will be done in secret; secret more meaning privately and without notice or fanfare and perhaps without having second thoughts about it. This is righteous giving; it is giving in the proper spirit. The good news is, says Christ, that the Father knows all secrets anyway so He sees all that we do, and knows all our hidden thoughts and motives, and knows if indeed our secret giving is about compassion, loving our neighbor, and obedience.... or not. Therefore The Father will be the source of whatever reward might be due to us. This of course sets up the dynamic that we all must continually and without fail ask ourselves; "whom do we choose to please?" If we have the inward motive of seeking humanity's

admiration and praise by our giving, we automatically do not receive God's praise or reward.

Perhaps this is a good time to say something that I, as head of Seed of Abraham Ministries, have never said outside of our staff meetings but adhere to even though it may be out of the norm. So many of you present here and out in the internet world and on Television are the most gracious and generous supporters of this ministry; I get a little emotional just thinking about it. Some have donated substantial amounts. You received a heartfelt thank you letter; however what you didn't receive was a gift depending on the level of your giving. You weren't enticed to get a bigger gift if you give a bigger donation. You also weren't brought up to this stage and thanked before the congregation for your large donation. Why? For your sake. Because I don't want any part of tempting anyone to give in the motivation of personal recognition, whereby that recognition causes you to lose your reward in Heaven. I don't want you to exchange an eternal reward for a fleeting one. And you know what? I've not had one person in the nearly 20 years of this ministry's existence ask for a gift (or stop giving because they didn't receive one), or ask for special recognition of some kind upon giving to us. Honestly, I would have returned the gift if that was the condition. This tells me that your giving is, and has been, in exactly the right spirit and intent and so your praise comes not from me but from your Heavenly Father.

Next, having addressed the issue of money and giving, Christ turns to how we ought to pray. Notice Yeshua says **WHEN** you pray, not **IF** you pray. Prayer was a serious every day matter for Jews of that era. It was rather usual for pious Jews to pray 3 times a day; something that seems to have begun during their exile in Babylon perhaps as an example or even an instruction from Daniel. Praying in public was normal because the spiritual was a natural part of everyday life. Sadly that seems almost strange to us in the West, where our society generally expects us to compartmentalize our faith and keep it quiet, subdued and out of sight. A few years ago I was in a restaurant with my family, and as we held hands and prayed I overheard a lady in a nearby table whisper to her dining companion: "is that legal?" She was quite concerned and serious. However, just as there is a proper attitude for the giving of charity and an improper one, there is always a proper way to pray and an improper way. Yeshua cites the improper way first: "Don't be like the hypocrites". Remember, the way the word hypocrite was taken to mean at that time was someone who was masquerading as being someone else; they were hiding who they really are. And how do they do this? Very similarly to the hypocrites who give money to the poor; it is by praying very

publicly, so that the public will acknowledge and admire them for their seeming generosity and piety.

So Christ's crowd is told not to stand on street corners or even in the synagogues where people will see them praying in some kind of way that I suppose you can't not notice. I have to tell you; I think what Christ has said up to this point could be taken as pretty severe; maybe even harsh. In fact, more than a few Bible commentators say that what we are reading is Matthew's worldview and not Jesus's because they can't see a passive, restrained, loving Jesus saying such things. However this is neither the first nor the last time Yeshua will be blunt and frank about the actions and insincerity that He has observed among His countrymen in a number of settings for the purpose of a race to the top to see who can be publicly seen as the most devout worshipper of God. Let me be clear on this matter: is it wrong to pray in the synagogue? Is it bad to pray on a street corner? Of course not. The issue is not prayer; it's the **misuse** of prayer in order to get self attention. Motive. Intent. People who pray in this improper manner will, like the givers to the poor who do it with the motive of self-recognition, get no praise or any well-done from The Father.

So after telling the crowd what they should NOT do, He tells them what they should do. They should go into their room, close the door, and pray to the Father in secret. Although we're very early on in Matthew's Gospel, I can tell you that in all the Gospel accounts we will never find Yeshua telling people to pray to Him. It is always to the Father that Jesus says prayer and honor are to be directed. Even more our praying should be in private, He says. Once more: is it wrong to pray when we're outdoors in the public? No. Is it wrong to pray indoors (like in a sanctuary) with others observing? No. What is wrong is to pray in the wrong attitude, with the wrong motive, and perhaps to the wrong god in whatever setting. So just like giving is to be done secretly.... more meaning giving without drawing attention to oneself, or expecting something in return..... so is prayer to be done secretly.... without the intent of drawing attention to oneself and instead it should be with the intent of having a personal conversation and relationship with the God of the Universe.

Many years ago, as I read this passage, it profoundly instructed and convicted me. I am one who always had a hard time praying silently, which was my usual way of prayer. It didn't take very long before my mind began to wander and soon I was thinking about a matter at work or having to mow the lawn or something else; I couldn't remember what I was praying. Interestingly, I don't think that we

find the concept of truly silent prayer in the Bible; or at least silent prayer being the norm. By silent prayer I mean that the mouth plays no role, and that the only organ that is involved is our brain. Although now that I've said it I'm sure someone will find an instance of silent prayer in the Bible and point it out to me. Nonetheless, using one's mouth, whether in a nearly inaudible whisper or a shout, was the customary manner of prayer (other than perhaps merely reading a prayer, silently). The idea of sitting in my room, by myself, door shut and praying out loud sounded odd to me. However, I tried it and suddenly I could pray without my mind wandering. Hearing the words that were coming from my own mouth caused me to pray in full, intelligible thoughts. Speaking to the Lord out loud makes it feel much more intimate and real for me. This is not to say that this is or should be every Believer's prayer experience.

So what is The Father's reward to us for proper prayer? The word in Greek for reward is *apodidomi*. And it is usually translated to English as reward. The Greek lexicons explain it means to restore, repay, or to recompense in proportion to what was done good or bad. Clearly that last meaning is the appropriate one for this situation. Therefore considering the context it can only be that God's reward for proper prayer is that He responds to it in kind. That doesn't mean that we always get what we want; rather it means that He will graciously pay attention and consider our prayers as opposed to ignoring them. God sets conditions for listening to prayer and answering them. Yeshua addresses that in a few verses.

But first I want to say something about prayer in general. Number one, there's no trick to it. If you can talk, you can pray. Eloquence not required. And even if you can't talk due to some physical problem, you can still communicate to God with your mind and soul. Shortly we'll read an example that Messiah gives us about the nature of a proper prayer. But as I zoomed around the web looking at what various Christian and Bible websites had to say about it, they nearly all spoke about it along these lines: ***God created us and knows infinitely more than we know. He knows what is best for us, and what would not be good for us. If you have children, when they were very small, sometimes they asked for things that would not be good for them, or would harm them. For good reasons sometimes parents do not always give their children what they ask for, when they ask for it. Parents give them what is best for them.***

Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? However that is decidedly not what proper prayer is about. Notice the prodigious use of thought of "what is good for us" (what is always best for us). Because of this modern tendency of Christians to think of

God as a kind genie who grants our personal wishes, and Our Savior who is here mainly for our hopes and dreams to be realized, then the theme of "God does what is best for us" is practically universal. However comforting that might sound to us, it is not biblical reality. God does what His purposes are. God does what His will is. And that goes for answering prayers. Making us happy is not usually at the top of the list. In fact, often God will answer a prayer in a way that isn't best for us, personally, from almost any worldview we can think of it; but rather He has another and greater purpose in mind that we may never know about (although sometimes later on we might see the fruits of it).

The goal of prayer ought to be to discover how we can best fit into The Father's plans, not how He should fit into ours. That is not to say that when we have needs or even desires that we shouldn't go to Him in prayer. When we're ill or injured we should pray for healing. If we're afraid, in dire straights financially, in great danger, and scores more reasons our first response ought to be prayer. Proper prayer. But any thought that His response is all about our earthly personal best is incorrect, even though many times the thing we want so badly indeed comes about. What we need to be more concerned about in our prayers is our eternal best and that, says Christ, is to be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven as opposed to being greatest on earth. And this greatness comes not from our will being done, but from seeking His will and following His laws and commands.

Prayer first and foremost must be an act of our humility and submission. An act of seeking, and not of instructing. Being a Believer gives us an audience before the King; it doesn't guarantee the outcome we want.

One final thought: throughout the Gospels we find Yeshua seeking solitude when He prays. So His instructions that we should pray "secretly" are no more nor less than what He personally did when He was on earth.

In verse 7 Christ gives another negative instruction; what we should NOT do. We should not babble on and on when we pray because, He says, that's what the pagans do. Please notice: pagans pray, too. So in our time when we mostly think of pagans as the godless (atheists) in fact pagan simply means those who do not worship Yehoveh as their only god. There is no ancient record of any society anywhere on earth that were atheist. Atheism was an invention of the academic elite early in the 18th century in Europe. It ought to be instructional to everyone everywhere that for however long one believes that humankind have existed, whether that is 6000 or 6,000,000 years, only in the past 300 years has the

notion of there being no god or gods been fabricated. In Jesus's day every one, of every culture, had some means and intent of praying to their gods. And indeed so did the occupying Romans.

In Christ's day the Holy Land was overrun with curious gentiles, and this was especially so in Jerusalem where Herod's Temple was thought of as one of the wonders of the world; so it was a must to visit. And then there were the 95% of all living Jews who lived outside of the Holy Land and therefore among these same gentiles. Knowing how the pagans prayed was common knowledge for the Jews. And apparently a lot of pagan religionists believed that the longer and the louder and the more public one prayed, their gods would hear them better and therefore the worshipper would have a better shot at getting what he wants. Because the Jews were surrounded by these gentiles it is human nature that some would take on some of the customs and traits they witnessed happening because it seemed good to them. And remember: few of the Jews in the crowd sitting before Yeshua had much actual Torah knowledge. What they had was Tradition knowledge, and so they followed whomever it was that was leading them in the synagogue.

Instead, says Jesus in verse 8, "don't be like them" and then tells us why we shouldn't. Even this however was not a new instruction that Yeshua came up with. It was long established biblically.

^{CJB} Ecclesiastes 5:1 (or 2) *Don't speak impulsively- don't be in a hurry to give voice to your words before God. For God is in heaven, and you are on earth; so let your words be few.*

It is because The Father already knows all our wants, desires and circumstances that we don't need to go on and on in our prayers. He already knows what our prayer is about before we pray it. It would be dishonest if I didn't confess that every now and then I wonder if I should pray about something because The Father already knows about it. And since His pre-knowledge of it is the case for every instance, then it is not unreasonable to ask: so then why should we pray? We pray for two reasons: first, because it is God's instruction and will that we do..... Old Testament and New. Second, because prayer is therefore beneficial to us and to the Kingdom. Prayer is part of the *shalom*.... the divinely given well-being... that God affords His worshippers. By praying we are obeying the Lord. By praying we are communing with God (a great privilege). And while communing with God is something He wants, we and not He are the beneficiaries of it. Thus biblically, regular prayer is a given. Yeshua is only reminding people

what proper prayer looks like.

When we are especially nervous or anxious, we can tend to get long-winded in our prayers. Nervousness and anxiety are the opposite of having stillness of mind. And having stillness of mind is a very hard thing to come by especially if we are in some kind of bad situation. However simplistic it may sound, the only means to achieve stillness of mind is complete and sincere trust in God. And therefore what comes next in Matthew is intended to be a means to achieve stillness of mind, and to maintain it. It is a quite short prayer that for centuries has been called The Lord's Prayer. It begins in verse 9.

We've already read it in the CJB, but I'd like you to hear it in a couple of other versions. Not so much because they interpret what is said differently, but because the words chosen for the interpretation can mean something a bit different to us when we hear them.

^{KJV} Matthew 6:9-13 ⁹ *After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. ¹⁰ Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

^{NAS} Matthew 6:9-13 ⁹ *"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. ¹⁰ 'Thy kingdom come. Thy 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 do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen .'*

Because prayer is so crucial in the life of Believer and in our relationship with God, we'll go through the example Christ gives us of what the elements of proper prayer ought to look like.

The very first words are "Our Father". It cannot be said enough times, or strongly enough, that due to the doctrines of modern Christianity never does Christ instruct that we pray to Him. Always He instructs that we are to pray to The Father. The implications behind this are many, and cause much debate within the Church such that entire denominations are founded on the conclusions about

these implications. And at the top of the list is about the nature of the Trinity.

I'm confronted often about this issue of the Trinity. People will ask me if I accept the Trinity Doctrine and my response is always the same: which one? Folks of every denomination have their own version of a Trinity Doctrine, which range from rejecting the notion outright all the way up to deciding which of the persons or attributes of God ought to be included. Among evangelical Christians, the most common version is that God consists totally and only of 3 persons: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And thus every manifestation of God that we learn of in the Bible must be one of these 3 persons even when they are given different names and characteristics. Further, this popular version of the Trinity Doctrine declares that the 3 persons are co-equal. There is no hierarchy. And even though there are 3 persons, they are yet but 1 God. Therefore they all have the same power, the same purpose, the same wisdom and share the same knowledge. Without addressing every one of these issue (and a few more), I'll only say this: the Trinity Doctrine is manmade. Never is it stated in the Bible. The closest thing to a direct statement comes in Matthew 28.

CJB Matthew 28:19 ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make people from all nations into talmidim, immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the Ruach HaKodesh,

So all the rest of the definition of a Trinity Doctrine (or better, of the several different Trinity Doctrines) is an interpretation and an amalgamation of several Bible passages that arrives at a certain belief about the nature and substance of God.

I can't get into defending or disagreeing with them all, and I probably am not even aware of every one of the wide range of them. But I can tell you this with absolute confidence: in the Gospels Christ never suggests anything but praying to the Father. He Himself is found in several occasions praying to the Father, and it is an absurdity to suggest that since (some believe) there is no divine hierarchy of the 3 persons then He must be praying to Himself. According to Jesus's own words the way, the manner and the person to whom prayer is to be directed according to the example He gives us, The Lord's Prayer, is to the Father alone.

We'll stop for now to give the Lord's Prayer our fullest attention and study next time.

