

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes August 23, 2006

Matthew 6:5-21

48: *You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Matthew, chapter 6

1: *"Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them;
for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*

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 men.
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 in praying 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.*

9: *Pray then like this:*

*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 lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil.*

14: *For if you forgive men their trespasses,
your heavenly Father also will forgive you;*

15: *but if you do not forgive men their trespasses,
neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

21: *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

Discussion Notes:

Intro: Conversion involves a change both inside and out.

- a. The Sermon on the Mount
 - Jesus calling & training disciples = call to holiness & union with Him.
 - i.e., Establishing, outlining, and establishing his program of discipleship.
- b. Beatitudes: the core of his teachings; ladder of renewal / foundation stones
 - Jesus is emphasizing the importance of internal conversion,
 - But this does NOT exclude the externals!
- c. Catechism on the importance of Internal conversion:

d. The important summarizing statement: 5:48

- But what did Jesus mean by perfection?
- Jesus is therefore talking about an attitude of life: heart, mind, soul, & strength.
- **Main question: Whom are you imitating?**
 - Jesus is saying NOT the Pharisees / scribes BUT our Father in heaven;
 - But how do we imitate a God we can't see?
 - Jesus will say Imitate me! (John 14:9)
 - But how do we imitate Jesus who we've never seen?
 - The Apostles will say "Imitate us as we imitate Him"
 - 1 Cor 13:1 *"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."*
 - Hebrews 13:7 *"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith."*
 - But how do we continue to imitate those who we have never seen?
 - 2 Tim 2:2, *"What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."*
 - The Church & her Sacred Tradition (John 14:25-26, 16:13)
 - The Saints (CCC, 828)

e. In 6:1-21, Jesus tells his novice disciples what this striving to be like the Father means as we live out our faith in community.

- **In 6:1 Jesus cautions his followers to beware of a tendency for misplaced motives;**
 - The external expressions of our faith carry the danger of ostentation,
 - And this danger, which shows on the outside, begins on the inside;
 - not merely our pious actions but our acts of righteousness that we owe God;
 - **Rewards:** bit of a mystery; Not obligating God for salvation;
 - More than salvation: The Church / Spiritual writers have expressed that somehow the level of our eternal experience of the Beatific Vision depends upon how we have lived by grace. (1 Corinthians 3:11-15)
- **In 6:21, Jesus caps off his discussion with the poignant statement:**
 - *"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."*
 - *The key is the HEART:*
 - 1 Sam 16:7 *"But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the HEART.'"*
 - Sirach 1:30, *"Do not exalt yourself lest you fall, and thus bring dishonor upon yourself. The Lord will reveal your secrets and cast you down in the midst of the congregation, because you did not come in the fear of the Lord, and your heart was full of deceit."*
 - Romans 8:26-27, *'Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.'*
 - John 15:4, *"Abide in me, and I in you."* (1 Cor 3:16, 6:19)
 - *Is your focus / motives horizontal or vertical? Human approval or God's? Earth or heaven?*

f. In 6:3-18 Three illustrations of this caution in three acts of piety his audience already knows:

- Jesus paints a familiar picture of a self-righteous hypocrite who makes sure everyone around him knows when he is giving alms, praying, or fasting.
- All with same pattern:
 1. The practice
 2. The abuse
 3. Condemnation of the abuse
 4. Advice
- All three begin with the phrase, "When you" ... implies these are acts they know & do.

g. **6:2-4 Almsgiving**

A: The Practice: *"Thus, when you give alms,*

- "Alms" does not in the first place have anything to do with money;
- More literally "mercy-mindness", so referring acts of mercy:

B: The abuse: *"sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men."*

- Did they really do this or hyperbole? (ceremony)

C: The Condemnation: *"Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward."*

- Solemn statement
- Their external trumpeting reveals an internal trumpeting!
- Their acts have lost any spiritual significance / benefits

D: The Advice: *"But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

- Do our acts of mercy without calculation, but rather leave to God who knows our actions, our hearts, motives, so leave it to Him; trust.

h. **6:5-15 Prayer**

A: The Practice: *"And when you pray,*

- Typical Jewish practice: Temple / synagogue; daily rhythm (3-7 times per day); impromptu.
- Much in teaching & practice of Jesus indicates that prayer was regular apart of their lives.
 - Mention this because not so today with much of world!

B: The abuse: *"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 men.

- Is Jesus condemning standing & praying in synagogues or at street corners? No! (5:14-16)
- He's condemning praying for the sake of those around you.
 - Those who attend worship because it's good for business, votes, etc.
 - Is this ever acceptable? (Pastors? Fathers? Leaders?)
 - As long as inner motive is sincere = God focused.
- But how can we ever be freed from mixed motives?!
 - My experience as a pastor; at early mass...for onlookers or God?!
 - Danger of "projecting"
 - Therefore, must listen to formed conscience:
 - Freedom of rubrics, liturgy, & litanies. (Ps 136)
& the confusion & anxiety of "just pray however you like."
 - We are freed up to pray without anxiety (6:25f; Phil 4:6, "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.")

C: The Condemnation: *"Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward."*

- Their prayer has lost any spiritual significance / effect.

D: The Advice: **Three things:**

- **1st: Hyperbolic corrective to help evaluate motives:**

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.

- Doing this cuts thru hypocrisy & sets inner "posture" / attitude for all prayer.
- Then you truly become aware of the battle of prayer!
- "room" = "storeroom" = heart.

- **2nd: Addresses another unmentioned yet familiar hypocritical practice**

7: "And in praying 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.

- Not condemning frequent or repeated prayers (like litanies, liturgy, rosaries)
For Jesus does this (Mk 14:39, "And again he went away & prayed, saying the same words." ; Mt 27:46 = Ps 22:1)
- Rosary = all Scripture!

- Nor are these prayers a means of manipulating God w/ many words!
- Since God knows ... why even pray?!
 - Because more matter of a contrite / obedient heart...
- 3rd. He gives them clear instruction on how to pray:

9: Pray then like this:

 - Imperative form = command
 - Some Christians emphasize “like” to mean merely a model & therefore refuse to pray the Lord’s Prayer!
 - The Didache, ch. 8:

“Do not pray like the hypocrites, but rather as the Lord commanded in His Gospel, like this: ‘Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily (needful) bread, and forgive us our debt as we also forgive our debtors. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one (or, evil); for Thine is the power and the glory for ever...’ Pray this three times each day.”