

## **Bible Readings**

### **Daniel 6:1-12**

It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, <sup>2</sup> with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. <sup>3</sup> Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. <sup>4</sup> At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. <sup>5</sup> Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."

<sup>6</sup> So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: "May King Darius live forever! <sup>7</sup> The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den. <sup>8</sup> Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed." <sup>9</sup> So King Darius put the decree in writing.

<sup>10</sup> Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. <sup>11</sup> Then

these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. <sup>12</sup> So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: "Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions' den?"

## **Matthew 6:5-18**

### **Prayer**

<sup>5</sup> "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. <sup>7</sup> And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

<sup>9</sup> "This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
<sup>10</sup> your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread.

<sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.'

<sup>14</sup> For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

### **Fasting**

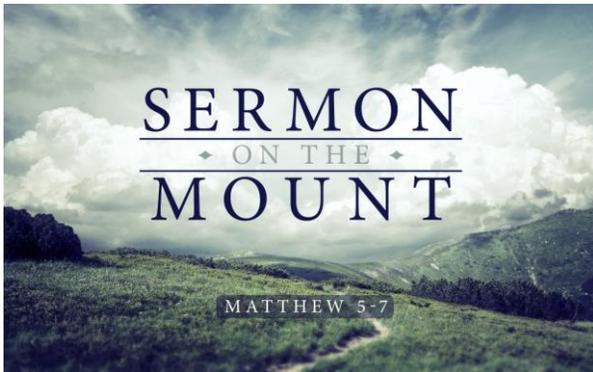
<sup>16</sup> "When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

**Context/Recap**

We are continuing our series on the **Sermon on the Mount** - **Matthew chapters**

**5-7**

[PowerPoint 1-Sermon on the Mount]



- One of the **purposes** of the **Sermon on the Mount** was to **tackle and convict** **those people who thought they were so holy and righteous** - by what they did in public view of everyone - like the **religious group** - **The Pharisees**
- In last week's passage - Matthew 6:1-4 - **Jesus** had **called** these self-righteous people **hypocrites**
- And He's **going to do the same again** - in our passage this morning
- Just a **recap** then on **what Jesus means** by hypocrite
- The **Greek word** means someone who sees the world as a stage on which they play a part
- These religious people were **all about getting praise** from their "audience" - the people watching them - as they gave money - as they prayed - and as they fasted - as we'll see

## Praying (Matthew 6:5-15)

- In **verses 5 to 15** of Matthew 6 - **Jesus teaches** his listeners **about prayer**
- **Prayer is a direct wi-fi to God** - no password needed
- Jesus comes up with **4 teachings** on prayer

**Jesus' 1st teaching is:**

[PowerPoint 2-V5/6]

### Sermon on the Mount

Chapter 6 – verse 5	Jesus' Teaching
Teaching #1 We must pray <u>in secret</u> before we pray in public!	<b>Don't be like the hypocrites – who want to be "seen by others"</b>

1. We must pray in secret before we pray in public (Matt 5:5-6)
  - See v5-6
  - It's not wrong to pray in public - the Apostle Paul encourages Timothy to pray on behalf of all people (1 Tim 2)
  - It's not wrong to pray and give thanks for food in public - Jesus did that in **John 6** when He fed the 5000
  - It's not wrong to pray for **God's help** in public - Jesus did that when He stood at Lazarus' tomb (John 11:41-42 & see also Acts 27:35)
  - But it is wrong to pray in public if we're not in the habit of praying in private.

- People watching may think we are in the habit of practicing prayer when we're not - that's acting like a hypocrite
- And it's wrong to pray in public like the Pharisees were doing - making a big show of standing up in the synagogue or on street corners - and their motive was "to be seen by others" in verse 5
- **Jesus warns** against that motive - and says the only reward we'll get for that performance is **applause from the "audience"** and no reward from God.
- Instead, **Jesus encourages** private prayer life
- The **word** used in v6 for **room** means "closet" - it's **private space**
- **Jesus** often prayed privately (Mark 1:35) in a **solitary place**
- As we saw in our OT reading - **Daniel prayed privately** in his **upper room** (Daniel 6:10)
- The **advantages of praying** in private are:
  - There are **no disturbances**
  - There are **no distractions**
  - We are **shut in with God** - and can **feel His presence intimately**
  - It **ensures** our motives are pure - and we're not just looking for attention and human praise
  - **God** is not interested in outward appearances - He's interested in our hearts
- Application: How is our prayer life - **aside from Sunday** - are we spending quality time praying to our Heavenly Father? Yes/No/Maybe? Prayer is powerful. {I recommend a movie called [War Room](#)}

(pause)

Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> teaching is in verses 7 and 8

2. We must pray sincerely (Matt 6:7-8)

[PowerPoint 3-V7/8]

#### Sermon on the Mount

Chapter 6 – verses 7&8	Jesus' Teaching
Teaching #2	Do not babble – and use many words to impress.
We must pray <u>sincerely</u>	God knows what you need before you ask.

- **Jesus teaches** not to babble our prayers and not to use lots of words - what **Jesus means here** is it's not the words that matter - but the sincere desire in our hearts as we pray.
- There is nothing wrong with repeating a prayer request - **Jesus repeated His request to the Father** in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-42) - The Apostle **Paul pleaded 3 times** for the thorn in his flesh to be removed (2 Cor 12:7-8)
- If we were to memorize and repeat the same prayers each day or each week - without us meaning what we are praying - it can become just by rote - and **Jesus is saying** this is not a sincere prayer from the heart
- *As Spurgeon says: "Christians' prayers are measured by weight, and not by length. Many of the most prevailing prayers have been as short as they were strong."*

- Another reason for not using many words is given in v8 - God knows what we need before we ask Him
- This begs the question why pray - if God already knows what we need?
- Well - the purpose of prayer is not just to ask for what we need
- The purpose of prayer is:
  - To communicate with God
  - It's how we maintain our relationship with God
  - It's a way of praising and worshipping Him
  - It's how we submit to His will for our lives and for other's lives
  - Prayer is the God-appointed way to have our needs met - the Apostle James says similar (James 4:1-3) - and says our motives for asking must be pure
  - And prayer brings glory to God
- Application: Are we sincerely coming to God in prayer - longing for a close and loving relationship with Him?

(pause)

Jesus' 3<sup>rd</sup> teaching is:

3. We must pray in God's Will (Matt 6:9-13)

[PowerPoint 4-V9-13]

## Sermon on the Mount

Chapter 6 – verses 9-13	Jesus' Teaching
Teaching #3	Jesus gives the Lord's prayer as an <u>example</u> or <u>pattern</u> of how to pray.
We must pray in <u>God's will</u> .	Begin with God's interests and then ours.  Everything we ask should be according to God's will for us.

- In **verses 9 to 13** - Jesus gives a prayer - we call it The Lord's Prayer but it would be **more accurate** to call it The Disciples' Prayer
- **Jesus** did not give this prayer to be memorised and repeated
- Yet - I acknowledge we do say the Lord's Prayer together each Sunday - and as we do, we need to be focusing on the meaning of the words we say.
- Jesus actually gave the Lord's Prayer as an example or pattern to follow
- **During our Sunday Worship - we have 2 prayers**
  - The first is a prayer of Adoration (Praise) and Confession
  - The second is our Pastoral Prayer - of thanks and supplication (shopping list)
- These 2 prayers follow the pattern of the Lord's Prayer
- In the Lord's prayer
  - We glorify God's name
  - We ask for help to accomplish His will on Earth
  - The prayer begins with God's interests - not ours - we speak of His hallowed (holy) name and His Kingdom and His will
  - We have no right to ask for anything that will dishonour His name, or delay His Kingdom or disturb His will on Earth

- **And notice the personal pronouns in the Lord's Prayer**
  - **Our Father - we are part of God's worldwide family of believers**
  - **Give us today our daily bread**
  - **Forgive us our debts**
  - **Lead us not into temptation**
- **If we put God's concerns first - we can then bring our needs**
- **We don't start with the shopping list first**
- **Prayer prepares us for the proper use of God's answer to our prayers**
- **If we know our need, and if we voice it to God - **trusting Him for His provision** - then we will make better use of God's answer than if God forced it on us without us asking**
- **And it's right to pray for our daily physically needs - it shows we are trusting Him day by day and not getting too far ahead of ourselves**
- **As we ask for our daily needs - **bread** (food), **forgiveness** and **protection from temptation** and evil - we are actually asking God to help us to get in step with His will for our lives**
- **Application - **are we praying according to God's will** - or our own will?**

(pause)

Jesus' 4<sup>th</sup> teaching is in verses 14 and 15

4. We must pray with a **forgiving spirit** (Matt 6:14-15)

[PowerPoint 5-V14-15]

#### Sermon on the Mount

Chapter 6 – verses 14-15	Jesus' Teaching
Teaching #4	Forgive others as God has forgiven us, through Jesus' death on the Cross.
We must pray <u>with a forgiving spirit</u> .	
Are there people in our lives we are not forgiving?	

Let me read vv14-15 again:

**14** For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **15** But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

- **Jesus is not teaching that believers earn God's forgiveness by forgiving others**
- **That would be contrary to God's free grace and mercy by sending Jesus to die for our sins to be forgiven**
- **What Jesus is teaching here is - if we have truly experienced God's forgiveness - through Jesus' death on the cross - then we will have a readiness to forgive and are ready to forgive one another like Jesus forgave us (Eph 4:32 and Col 3:13).**
- **When we realize how much we've been forgiven by Jesus - we should want to forgive others in the same way (example is the parable of the unmerciful servant Matthew 18:21-35)**

- We've seen in the Lord's Prayer that **prayer is a family affair** (pronouns like "we" and "us") - if we're not getting along with our church family - how can we claim to have a right relationship with our Father?
- Application: We should **ask ourselves** if there are people in our lives that we are not forgiving. What are we going to do about that?

(pausing)

### Fasting (Matthew 6:16-18)

In the last few verses of our NT passage this morning - vv16 to 18.

Jesus talks about fasting

[PowerPoint 6-Fasting]

#### Sermon on the Mount

Chapter 6 – verses 16-18	Jesus' Teaching
Fasting	When fasting – don't draw attention to yourself, don't be a hypocrite.
Fast <u>in secret</u> .	
True Fasting is: Promoting justice. Freeing the oppressed. Feeding the hungry. Clothing the poor.	

- **Fasting is abstaining from food** for a specific amount of time
- In the OT - the people fasted on the Day of Atonement - when the High Priest made a sacrifice for sin on behalf of all the people of Israel
- **Fasting has several purposes:**
  - Fasting is an **expression of sorrow for sin** - and so people deny **themselves of food** to focus on saying sorry to God

- Fasting is also an expression of dependence and self-humbling before God - for the purpose of praying for a great need (e.g., Jehoshaphat in 1 Chron 20:3 commanded a fast when Israel was in danger; Queen Esther asked the Jews to fast before she approached the King (Esther 4:16)
- Fasting is also a way of increasing a person's self-control - keeping control of their body (as the Apostle Paul did in 1 Cor 9:24-27) - and fasting can help to focus on God - for spiritual self-improvement
- And fasting is a way of going without - to provide for others. In Isaiah 58 God describes what true fasting is. It's not just a religious exercise - it's going without to focus on God and to focus on the needs of others. So, in Isaiah 58 - God says true fasting is - forgetting about ourselves so we can help others who are treated unjustly - so we can help people who are oppressed so that they are freed from oppression - it's going without so the hungry can be fed - and going without - so those who are poor and have no clothes - can be clothed
- Again, here - Jesus teaches about motive when fasting - just like He did with praying
- See v16 - He says when fasting - don't have a long miserable face - so everyone knows you're fasting - and says "oh poor you, it must be so hard fasting"

- No, Jesus says in v17-18 - put oil on your head - wash your face - put some makeup on - so we don't look like we're fasting and so no one knows what we're doing
- Jesus says fast in secret
- Fasting is not about us - it's about focusing on God - and focusing on the need we are praying for
- And Jesus says there's a reward - it won't be a public one
- It will be the joy in knowing - we've focused on God - we've focused on the prayer need for others - and we've seen the prayer need answered - that's our reward!
- Application - if we are truly concerned about a need - like the people in Timor Leste affected by the cyclone Seroja - or the people of Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga affected by cyclone Harold or the people in NSW affected by the recent floods - What we could do is pray and fast - and the money we might have spent on lunch or dinner for the next week - we could donate to these causes? And no one needs to know we've done it - no trumpets!

## Responses

To finish up then

[PowerPoint 7a-Heading]

Whether it's praying or fasting - or giving (which we looked at last week)

Jesus is addressing the problem of hypocrisy - putting on a big theatrical performance when giving, praying or fasting - so that we get applause from the "audience"

Jesus is saying when we do that:

- We are saying our public reputation is more important than our Christian character
- We are saying our words and show of words are more important than true heartfelt prayer
- We are saying our public demonstration of fasting is more important than a heart of compassion for those in need

No wonder Jesus compared the Pharisees to tombs that were whitewashed on the outside but filthy and dead on the inside (Matt 23:27-28)

Being a hypocrite like this not only robs us of Christian character - but it also robs us of spiritual influence - the Pharisees were a negative influence on the people who looked up to them and listened to them - because the Pharisees modelled a self-righteous and hypocritical behaviour and led people astray.

So, lets finish with 2 responses to Jesus' teaching here:

[PowerPoint 7b-2 Responses]

**Responses**

1. *Our motive must be to please God alone!*
2. *Our giving, praying and fasting must be from a genuine sincere heart.*

1. Let us be honest with God in our secret life. The **most important part of a Christian's life** is the part that God alone sees. **Our motive must be to please God alone.**
2. Let our giving, our prayers and our fasting - be from a genuine sincere heart. Never for show and never for human praise!

**Let's pray...**