

Sermon on the Mount Sermon Series

Sermon 21

Right Motives in Service

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus began by outlining and explaining the principles of the kingdom of God. The principles of a kingdom find expression in its laws. We saw that the underlying principle of the kingdom of heaven is love. How is this love expressed in laws? Jesus gives several examples. Love does not kill. Not only that but it also does not retaliate, it does not take revenge. Not only that but love does not hate from the heart. The law of God not only reaches to the actions, but also to the thoughts and motivations behind actions. If we hate in our heart we are murderers. If we lust in our hearts we are adulterers. The law is spiritual.

In the next section of the sermon on the mount Jesus speaks about giving alms, about praying and fasting. Now all three of these activities are religious actions. Isn't it good if people are doing religious activities? Jesus showed that the real motivation behind many people's religious activities is not the glory of God but the glorification of self. Jesus shows that the one who loves self breaks the law of love.

Matthew 6:1-4 "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. ²"Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ³ "But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ "that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

Jesus shows that a person can do the right thing for the wrong reason. If you give a charitable gift, why are you doing it? Are you interested in helping someone or are you trying to show everyone else how charitable you are? Perhaps there is a mixed motivation there. You may feel the impulse to do good but it is mixed with self glorification. If our motivation is self, this is not love. This is not the kingdom of God.

Matthew 6:5-6 "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ⁶ "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

True love for God and others does not try to draw attention from everyone else. Jesus is saying that true religion is not a show.

Matthew 6:7 "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen *do*. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

Have you seen people who count the repetition of their prayers? Why do they do that? Do they think that God will reward them because they worked hard and made an effort? Do they think that their prayers atone for their sins? What does that say about their understanding of God? Is prayer a business transaction where we are buying God's favor with religious activity? Are prayers a way to get permission from God to continue breaking His own law?

Notice that Jesus refers to God in these verses as Father. Jesus is showing the relation of us to God in a way like the relation of a child to a father. Does the child need to earn the father's love? No. The father loves the child already. The father wants to give good things to the child. The child obeys the father out of love.

Matthew 6:9-13 "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your 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 forgive our debtors. ¹³ And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

This prayer is very comprehensive and we will not examine it in detail today. For now we want to point out just a few things. First, this prayer is not a magic formula that when you repeat it word for word you get what you want. It is a general example of what prayer should be. We can address God as our Father showing a close relationship and yet God is also holy and His name is holy. When we pray for the kingdom of God to come we are praying for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. That means we must order our lives according to God's will here on earth. We ask God for our daily needs. We ask for strength against temptation and protection from Satan and his forces. Jesus also touches on a subject that He expands on in the following verses.

Matthew 6:14-15 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

If we want our sins forgiven we must have a forgiving attitude toward others. We will look at this in more detail next time.

Matthew 6:16-18 "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ¹⁷ "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ "so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your

Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Some people fast and they want everyone to know they are fasting and being very religious. They are upset if someone else is not fasting and eats in front of them. When they get angry are they fasting for God or are they fasting for show? How do you make your fasts?

In the days of Jesus there was a religious group among the Jews. They were called the Pharisees. The Pharisees were very religious outwardly. They gave alms, prayed and fasted in the manner Jesus described above. A lot of attention is given to the Pharisees in the Bible. Why? The characteristics of the Pharisees are the characteristics of humanity in all ages. The spirit of Pharisaism is the spirit of human nature. We are born selfish and we naturally seek to exalt ourselves. We naturally try to draw attention to ourselves. The love of self is what causes problems in our world. The love of self is manifest in a million ways and often thinly disguised under the cloak of religion. It was true in Jesus' day and it is true in our day.

The Pharisees were continually trying to earn God's favor. There is nothing wrong with pleasing God. But they were trying to earn God's favor because they thought worldly honor and prosperity were the reward of virtue. Their motives were selfish.

Jesus showed the contrast between His own spirit and methods and those of the Pharisees and rabbis. His teaching is equally applicable to the people of all time.

Have you ever examined yourself to try to understand why you do what you do? What are your real motivations? If you are a child of Adam then naturally your motivations are selfish. If you have good inclinations then it shows that the Spirit of God is actively working in your life. But to live a truly unselfish life we need to have the principle of love working from within us. We need to have the Holy Spirit in us. This is the new birth. We must be born again.

The Spirit of God brings the Spirit of Christ into your life. You must ask for it. God wants to give you the Spirit of Christ but He doesn't force it on you. You receive the Spirit of Christ when you confess that Jesus is Savior and Lord.

Many people believe that Jesus is the Messiah. But that alone does not bring the Spirit of Christ into their life. It does not save them from eternal death. Why? To accept Jesus as Savior means there must be a humble confession to God that we are sinners. It means to confess that we cannot change our selfish condition and keep God's law of love. To confess that Jesus as Lord means we must believe that God can and will change our lives with the Spirit of Christ living in us. There must be a surrender of the life to God's will.

John 6:28-29 Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?"²⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."