

The Sermon on the Mount (Part 2)...

Matthew 6

According to John Wesley, this chapter falls into four parts: “(a) The right intention and manner of giving alms (v 1 to 4); (b) the right intention, manner, form and prerequisites of prayer (v 5 to 15); (c) the right intention and manner of fasting (v 16 to 18); and (d) the necessity of a pure intention in all things, unmixed either with the desire of riches, or worldly care, and fear of want... (v 19 to 34)”

Notice Jesus’ use of the word ‘when’: “when you give to the needy” (v 2); “when you pray” (v 5); “when you fast” (v 16); doing these things is not an option – it is part and parcel of following Christ.

Giving to those in need (Matthew 6 v 1 to 4)

- The word used here is ἐλεημοσύνη (*ele-eimosuneī*), which means “mercy, pity especially as exhibited in giving alms, charity; the benefaction itself, a donation to the poor” – it includes giving to charities, but has the wider meaning of ‘acts of kindness’ – the giving of time and emotion, not just money. What is the wrong way, and what is the right way, to give to those in need?

Prayer (Matthew 6 v 5 to 15)

- The word here is προσεύχη (*proseukei*), which means “to offer prayers, to pray”. Much has been written on the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ (really the ‘Disciples’ Prayer’) – see for example Matthew Henry’s (1662 to 1714) commentary on “Give us this day our daily bread...” (v 11) What do verses 9 and 10 tell us about God and our attitude to him? What sorts of things should we ask for? If we are to pray this prayer sincerely, what kind of relationship do we need to have (a) with God, and (b) with others?

Fasting (Matthew 6 v 16 v 18)

- This word is νηστεύω (*neisteuo*), which means “to abstain as a religious exercise from food and drink: either entirely, if the fast lasted but a single day, or from customary and choice nourishment, if it continued several days”. What is the wrong way, and what is the right way, to fast? For the kind of fast that pleases God, see Isaiah 58 v 5 to 7.
- “They have received their reward”: Jesus uses this phrase three times (v 2, 5 and 16) – what point does he make in relation to the above three activities?

Treasures in Heaven (Matthew 6 v 19 to 24)

- Here Jesus presents us with three choices: (a) the choice between two treasures; (b) the choice between two visions; and (c) the choice between two masters. So how exactly, in practical terms, can we store up for ourselves treasures in heaven? Do you think this idea is linked to verse 10, and also to verse 33? See also Proverbs 11 v 30, Daniel 12 v 3, 1 Peter 1 v 3 to 5. If we are preoccupied by material gain, then we are not serving God; but if we are truly serving God, we do not need to be overly concerned about money!

No worries... (Matthew 6 v 25 to 34)

- Many times Jesus says “Do not be anxious...” (v 25, 31, 34). What reasons does he give for us not to have excessive anxiety? What's the difference between being anxious and taking responsibility? What is the link between anxiety and prayer? See Philippians 4 v 6 and 7.

Looking back over Matthew chapter 6, how many times does Jesus tell us that our Heavenly Father knows our needs and cares about us? If we worry excessively, it means that we don't really trust God...

Pray “Our Father in heaven...” meaningfully...