

Sunday, March 31, 2019

This sermon is the next in a series of sermons regarding the “Sermon on the Mount” found in Matthew 5-7. A high-level summary of the Sermon on the Mount that I’ve been using is:

1. Our essential characteristics (what we are) – vv. 5:3-12
2. Our function in the world – vv. 5:13-16
3. Our relationship to the law – vv. 5:17-48
- 4. Our religious life – vv. 6:1-18**
5. Our mundane life – vv. 6:19-34
6. Our relationship to other people – vv. 7:1-12
7. Being doers and not hearers only – vv. 7:13-27

As a recap to my previous sermons, the Sermon on the Mount starts with what is commonly known as the Beatitudes. These declarations of blessedness are none other than the essential characteristics of the children of God. It all starts with poverty of spirit, where you understand that you are destitute and wholly reliant on God to supply your spiritual needs. People whose heart is in that condition will mourn for their sins, they will meekly, quietly, and willingly submit to the will of God, and they will consequently desperately hunger and thirst after the righteousness of God – they want to be right with God! Flowing from that is that we are merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and persecuted for righteousness’ sake. Being merciful means that you see the people around you in the wretched condition that they’re in, as slaves of sin and Satan, and you do something about it – you preach and you pray. You tell them what the remedy is for that condition. You don’t enable them in their sin, and you don’t throw away the holiness and righteousness of God, though – that isn’t mercy; that’s hatred. Being pure in heart is being single-minded and being free from the defilement of sin. It means you are in a condition where God has given you a new heart and has regenerated you. Being a peacemaker means that you tell people how to have peace. Lasting, real peace. And that comes one way – being reconciled with God. Finally, being persecuted for righteousness’ sake is the result of it all, and we take that persecution joyfully. Nobody wants to hear your brand of mercy, purity, and peace, because it interferes with their love of sin and depravity; the mercy and peace that God gives is quite unlike anything that the world has to offer. So, they’ll do what they can to shut you up.

Those people who possess the attributes described in the beatitudes have a certain function and influence in the world, which is described as “salt” and “light.” As I mentioned previously, salt is used for seasoning, preservation, healing, medicinal purposes, offerings, covenants, and to destroy and make desolate. And in the scripture, light is a symbol of understanding, wisdom, goodness, virtue, life, righteousness, truth, guidance, joy, holiness, etc. The world is a

corrupt, dark place, and the people of God act as agents of preservation and enlightenment. We affect the world around us by our words and our actions, just as salt and light influence the things that are salted and enlightened. We cannot act as salt and light unless we remain separate and distinct from the world; otherwise, we're not any different than the thing that we're supposed to be influencing.

Christ then proceeds to tell us how we are to live as salt and light, which brings us to one of the linchpin verses of the entire sermon: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:20). Most of the rest of the sermon is an exposition of this concept, and He starts with the law of God. Christ viewed the Old Testament as absolutely preeminent, authoritative, unchangeable, and infallible, telling us that He did not come to do away with it, but rather to fulfill it. The law of God defines God's righteous standards and was put in place not to show us how wonderful we are, but to show us how corrupt we are, and how hopelessly unable we are to establish our own righteousness. The scribes and Pharisees, on the other hand, had a wholly superficial, external view of the law, and didn't understand the spiritual meaning behind it all. They thought it was a checklist of rules to follow, to make yourself righteous. They redefined it to allow themselves to sin, and then passed themselves off as righteous men. Jesus knocked the façade down by addressing six sins that defined their existence (and really the existence of humanity in general) – anger, lust, divorce, lying, revenge, and hatred. It's not just external acts - it's what is in the heart that is important. For example, they thought it was enough to not commit murder; He told them it's just as bad to have anger and contempt in your heart for your brother. They thought it was enough to not commit the physical act of adultery; He told them they've already committed adultery in their hearts when they look on a woman to lust after her. They thought it was enough to love their neighbor but hate their enemy; He told them no, you must love even your enemies.

And that brings us to the next section, Matthew 6:1-18, which deals with what I've called "our religious life." This is a continuation on what it means for our righteousness to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, specifically in how we behave in religious matters. The Pharisees had an inadequate, superficial, hypocritical theology (which we learned about in chapter 5 when we saw how they fatally misinterpreted the law of God). And that carries over into inadequate, superficial, hypocritical behavior in religious matters. There's a direct link between your beliefs and your behavior – bad doctrine (theology) begets bad behavior. The prevailing characteristic of Pharisaical religion was hypocrisy: "Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me." (Mark 7:6).

As a brief overview, Jesus talks about three areas of our religious lives here in this section: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. It is how we relate to other people, how we relate to God, and how we mortify our own flesh. You'll see that it is assumed that we are doing these things. He doesn't say "if," but rather, "when." "When thou doest alms...when ye pray...when ye fast." His main message is that when you do these things, don't behave like the hypocrites do. They do them to be seen by men, to impress them, and show them how holy and pious they are. The Greek word for "hypocrite" is "hypokrites" and it means "an actor, stage player, pretender." And interestingly, the Greek word translated "seen" in Matthew 6:1 is "theaomai," from which we get the English word "theater." These guys behaved like actors on the stage. All they were interested in was how they appeared to men, so they could get their applause. And if your goal is to impress men, then congratulations – you'll impress them, and you'll get what you were after. But you will get no reward from God.

**“Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity...How can ye escape the damnation of hell?” (Matthew 23:28,33)**

Now, the more astute among us might raise a question here. You might say, “Hold on here. Back in chapter 5, He said we're supposed to be the light of the world and that we're supposed to let our light shine before men, so they may see our good works. Now He's telling us not to do our works in front of men. Which is it?” And the answer is that He's talking about intent. Just like every other thing you do, your spirit and your intent is of utmost importance. What's your intent? Why are you doing the works? Is it for the glory of God? Or is it because you want the glory of men? Matthew 5:16 tells you to do your good works so men may see them “and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 6:2 tells us that hypocrites do their work to be seen of men so “that they may have the glory of men.”

This will be good for us to go over this passage. We all have some hypocrisy. We all put on a show from time to time. But God isn't interested in your religious activities if you're a fraud. He told you to do these things (almsgiving, praying, fasting), but He doesn't want to have anything to do with them if they're not done from a sincere heart. Just as He instituted the feast days for Israel, but then because of their phoniness, He said, “I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies.” (Amos 5:21).

**“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest [thine] alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in**

**secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.” (Matthew 6:1-4)**

The first question here is, what is meant by “alms”? It is the Greek word “eleemosyne” which means having mercy or pity on someone, especially as exhibited in a benefaction. People commonly refer to it as “charitable deeds” or “charitable donations” nowadays. It is giving something (commonly money) to a person who is in need, as you are able to do it. It’s not just a feeling of mercy or compassion – it’s actually giving.

**“But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:17)**

I’ve mentioned this before, and I’ll mention it again: this doesn’t mean that you need to enable people in their laziness, or their drunkenness, or their fraud, or any other sin. “If any would not work, neither should he eat.” (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Now, when it comes to this issue of alms, if there was ever a thing that people like to flaunt and take refuge in, this is it. It’s sickening. People absolutely love for others to know about their acts of charity – their good deeds for the day. They keep track of it, they publish it, they write puff pieces about it. They want to make sure that other people know about it. But it’s even worse than that – people actually think that this behavior makes them good – they strut around with their swelled egos thinking, “I help the poor; I’m a good person.” We learned last time that by nature, we’re all murderous, adulterous, unfaithful, lying, vindictive haters...but if I give a few bucks to the March of Dimes, then I’m a good person. Others think that almsgiving will save them; it will atone for their sins. I’m not making this up. The apocryphal book Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus) was written by a Jewish rabbi and is part of the Catholic Bible. Verse 3:30 says, “As water quenches a flaming fire, so almsgiving atones for sins.” The apocryphal book Tobit, verse 12:9, says, “almsgiving saves from death and purges every kind of sin.” Teachings in the Talmud have notions like "Alms-giving is more excellent than all offerings," is "equal to the whole law," will "deliver from the condemnation of hell," and will "make one perfectly righteous."

In fact, it was the abuse of almsgiving in the Catholic church (among other things) that prompted Martin Luther to write his 95 theses, which kicked off the Protestant Reformation. The Catholic Church was in a financial crisis and needed money (for example, to pay for the reconstruction of St. Peter’s Basilica), and one of the ways that they did this was by collecting alms as part of their sacrament of penance. A Catholic preacher named Johann Tetzel was particularly vile to Martin Luther. He would say things like: “*You should know: whoever has confessed and is contrite and puts alms into the box, as his confessor counsels him, will have all*

*of his sins forgiven...so why are you standing idly? Run, all of you, for the salvation of your souls...Do you not hear the voices of your dead parents and other people, screaming and saying: 'Have pity on me, have pity on me...We are suffering severe punishments and pain, from which you could rescue us.'*" He became known for the saying, "As soon as the gold in the casket rings, The rescued soul to heaven springs." Or, sometimes seen as, "As soon as a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs."

So, almsgiving has a long history of being abused, and being done for all the wrong reasons. If it's done for any other reason than for the glory of God, then it's the wrong reason. What Jesus tells us here is that the hypocrites made a big show of it everywhere they went, because they were interested in the glory of men, not the glory of God. Did they actually "sound a trumpet"? Did they literally go around blowing trumpets to draw attention to themselves? I don't know, and I don't think it matters – His point is clear. And may I point out that from time to time, we all have our trumpets, whatever they may be, to draw attention to ourselves. Some more ostentatious, and some more subtle.

He tells us that when we do our alms, "let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." What does this mean? I think it has to do with giving when you see a need, and then forgetting about it. Don't announce it. Don't dwell on it. Don't pat yourself on the back about it. Don't talk about it. Don't think about it. His aim here is not to give us a rigid, legalistic rule to "never do your alms where anyone can see it." His aim is to tell us that our hearts need to be right, and we need to be doing it for the right reasons, because God knows the "secrets of the heart." (Psalm 44:21).

**"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites [are]: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen [do]: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as [it is] in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 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. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."** (Matthew 6:5-15)

Prayer should be an integral part of our lives. It is intimate communion with God and is something that we should do naturally and continuously, like breathing. Shamefully, however, there is often a whole lot of talk about prayer, and not a whole lot of doing. We often squander this wonderful resource of being able to talk directly to God. Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to “pray without ceasing.” The other thing that we’re supposed to be doing all the time is meditating on the Word of God – “His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.” (Psalm 1:2). This should be what is on our mind all the time. It doesn’t mean that we must constantly be bowing in prayer with Bible in hand, but it’s a way of life – we should be viewing the world through the lens of the scripture, and we should have a mindset toward God where we’re thankful and content and looking to glorify Him in everything that we do and say. God speaks to us in the Word, and we speak to Him through prayer. If you can understand that simple thing, you’ll be a long way to understanding what it means to commune and have fellowship with God. The two (reading scripture and praying) go hand in hand. The more time you spend in the one, the more time you spend in the other. And people who are lax in reading the Bible are lax in prayer.

What we see here in this passage is that the nature of sin is so atrocious that it even follows us to the very throne of God. If you want to see the true nature of sin in all its insidiousness and depth, you’re going to see it when you go into the presence of God during prayer and find your prideful, self-centered heart engaging with the King of Eternity. We sin even as we pray. Prayer is not for you to get God to go along with what you want; it’s for you to conform your will to His will. The essence of all proper praying is a sincere and heart-felt “not as I will, but as thou wilt.” (Matthew 26:39). The end of prayer is to glorify God (see John 14:13).

Christ tells us what not to do when we pray – He says don’t do it like the hypocrites and the heathen do it. The hypocrites do it for show. They want to make sure everyone sees them. The more public the place, and the more people gathered there to see them, the better. Mark 12:40 tells us that these hypocrites would “for a pretence make long prayers.” They wanted to impress everyone with their vast intelligence and abilities as wordsmiths. The heathen used vain repetitions. They thought this was the way to wake God up, and badger Him to do what they wanted Him to do, like the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel with Elijah. Or they just went through the motions and mindlessly repeated some words.

Christ tells us that, on the contrary, we should go into our closets, shut the door, and pray in secret. Like everything in this Sermon on the Mount, He isn’t giving us a legalistic command. He’s not saying, “you can’t ever pray where anyone else can see it.” On the contrary, there are certainly times where it is appropriate to have public prayers (see 2 Chronicles 6 and Acts 4). He’s not condemning the act of public prayer per se...He’s condemning the act of praying in public with the intent of being glorified by men. Going into your closet to pray can be done

anywhere, as long as your heart is right – wherever you are, the idea is that you mentally and spiritually separate yourself and focus on God. Going into your closet can also be a big public display, if you make sure that everyone knows about it. Similarly, long prayers aren't necessarily wrong, and repetitious prayers aren't necessarily wrong – it's only wrong if you're doing it for the wrong reasons. Perseverance in prayer is good (see Luke 18:1-8), but if you think you're going to browbeat God with multiplied words so He'll see things your way, then that's bad. Often times, when we talk about "taking it to the Lord," what we really mean is, "I've already decided what I want, so I'm going to go get the Lord to come along with me, and if He doesn't answer my prayer on my terms then I'm going to become rebellious and discontented." But the point of prayer is to commune with God, praise Him, glorify Him, thank Him, offer petitions to Him in accordance with His will, and submit to His will. It's not to inform Him of things...He already knows everything about you and what you need. He has bid us to pray. It's pleasing to Him. He delights in it. It's grievous to Him when you don't do it, or when you make light of it. You often have more to say to your friends than you do to your heavenly Father.

So, He provides to us here a pattern of prayer, commonly called "The Lord's Prayer." This is not a rote set of words that we're expected to mechanically repeat – it's more of an outline that we fill in with our specifics. This standard of prayer laid out by Christ is God-centric – that is, He focuses on God. The prayer of the Pharisees, on the other hand, focused on themselves. Christ's pattern of prayer addresses God, the first three petitions regard the holiness, kingdom and will of God, the last three petitions regard how God provides all our great needs (natural body, forgiveness of sins, and being kept from sin), and it ends by praising God. Often, we go to prayer as a last-ditch effort because we're in dire straits, or we rush into prayer and it's immediately all about us – "here's what I want, here are my problems, here are my concerns." I'm suggesting that when you go to pray, pause for a second and remember who you're talking to. This is the Creator of the universe and the God of eternity that you're addressing, who has graciously condescended to engage in intimate communion with His beloved children. One of His names is, "thou that hearest prayer." (Psalm 65:2). "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth." (Psalm 145:18).

### **Our Father which art in heaven**

When we address God, we are addressing our Father in heaven. He isn't some impersonal force permeating the universe – He is a personal God, and we have a Father-child relationship with Him. In the sense of being our Creator, it's true that God is the Father of all mankind (see Malachi 2:10 and Acts 17:29). But that's not what this is talking about. This is talking about that special relationship that God has with believers, because He has adopted us as sons:

**“Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” (Galatians 4:6)**

In this sense, believers are the children of God, and unbelievers are the children of the devil (see John 8:44, 1 John 3:10, John 1:12). God isn't interested in communing with rebellious children of the devil (e.g., Proverbs 28:9). But He loves communing with His sons and daughters. A child has a certain level of intimate access to his father that other people don't have. That's what this is talking about. Some attributes of our Father that we can find in scripture are: there is a close, family relationship, since He begets his children (1 Peter 1:3); there is love, pity, compassion, and mercy from Him to His child (Psalm 103:13); He guides His children (Jeremiah 31:9); and He requires obedience (Deuteronomy 32:6). And He isn't merely a Father – He's a Father who dwells in heaven. He has all the eternal resources of heaven at His disposal, such that He can bless us with all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3).

### **Hallowed be thy name**

He isn't just our heavenly Father, though – He is also holy. If you focus only on the “Father” part, there's a danger of your view of God being too maudlin. This is the first petition in the prayer – we pray that His name be hallowed.

When we talk about a “name” we're not talking about the simple word “God” or “Jesus” or “Jehovah.” We understand this because we use the word “name” similarly in our common talk, like when we say that someone has a “good name” or “has made a name for himself.” God's name represents all that He is; it refers to all the attributes that make Him up. In Exodus 34:5-6, God “proclaimed the name of the Lord.” He didn't stand there and say “Lord” repeatedly. Rather, He gave a list of His attributes – mercy, judgment, goodness, etc.

“Hallowed” means to make holy, or to recognize and honor as being holy. Obviously, we're not going to make God any more holy than He already is. The point of the prayer is to recognize that holiness – He is sacred, separate, uncommon, undefiled, extraordinary, different. It is a petition that we will hallow Him by believing and proclaiming accurate things about Him and living lives of obedience. And it expresses the desire that God would receive the reverence, adoration and glory that is due Him in the world.

### **Thy kingdom come**

The kingdom of God is a very large subject, but basically, to pray “thy kingdom come” means to pray that Christ will reign as King. In one sense, God is King over the whole universe (see Psalm 103:19). In another sense, the kingdom of God is here right now in the church, as He reigns in our hearts (Luke 17:21, Colossians 1:13). And in another sense, Christ is going return

to earth and rule with a rod of iron in truth and righteousness for 1000 years, and then hand the kingdom back to the Father for all eternity “that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28). So, to pray “thy kingdom come” is to pray that whatever needs to happen to advance His kingdom and hasten His return, will happen. This would include at least three things: 1. For Him to call His loved ones out from the corrupt mass of unbelievers in this world. 2. For Him to reign in our hearts to a greater degree, such that our lives would become more and more Christ-like. 3. For Him to return “in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:8) and to take His throne as King of kings and Lord of lords on this earth.

It’s important to note that it’s HIS kingdom. All our desires are subservient to that. History is marching on day by day, and the end of it will be the glorification of Christ on His throne. All human history is pointing to that day, and all the events that fall out by providence are bringing us there. Our prayer should be for HIS cause, not our own.

### **Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven**

We need to be careful when we’re talking about “the will of God” to make clear what we’re talking about. The scripture talks about the will of God in different senses, sometimes divided into what we can call His “will of decree” (or, “will of purpose”) and “His will of command” (also referred to as His secret and revealed wills - I did a sermon on this subject on January 25, 2015). In His “will of decree,” whatever He decrees will certainly happen: “Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.” (Isaiah 14:24). His “will of command” refers to what He has commanded us to do, and this will of God can be thwarted by men. For example, “Thou shalt not kill.” (Exodus 20:13). His will is that we shouldn’t kill, but people kill all the time.

When we pray “thy will be done,” our prayer is about His will in both senses. We pray for His “will of command” to be done when we pray for His commandments to be followed, just as the inhabitants of heaven have a great desire to do His will unquestioningly, sincerely, constantly, etc. We pray for His “will of decree” to be done by recognizing His sovereignty and acknowledging that all His decrees will, in fact, be accomplished, and His promises will come to pass. A good example is in Revelation 22 – verses 7, 12, and 20 all say, “I come quickly.” This is a decree of God – He will return. But John still prays, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” (v. 20).

A common objection is, if God has already decreed things, and they will certainly come to pass, why are we praying? How can prayer be consistent with His sovereignty and predestination of all things? We have a sermon from April 21, 1959, on that very subject, so I’m not going to rehash all that. Let me just say that the same God who decreed the end also

decreed the means to the end. He told us to pray, and He told us that “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” (James 5:16). Christ Himself gave us a wonderful example of this in the Garden. He knew that He was going to be crucified – there was no question about it - it had been determined in eternity. Yet He still prayed, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” (Luke 22:42).

The Bible is full of truths that our finite minds can't fully understand and reconcile. So, I would encourage you to not let your lack of ability to reconcile difficult Biblical truths destroy your duty to fervently pray. God is absolutely sovereign AND prayer avails much.

### **Give us this day our daily bread**

So far, the prayer has been exclusively about God. Now it starts to address our needs. But prayer is not about sweet-talking God, and then making our demands. This part of the prayer is just as much about the glory of God as the first part. We are recognizing that God is the source of everything that we need for our physical bodies. “Daily bread” is not talking about a loaf of bread – it's talking about all our physical needs, and that we need Him each day to provide what is necessary for us on that day. I'm not talking about mumbling a phony, rote prayer whenever you sit down to eat – I'm talking about a deep-down recognition that everything that you have comes from God. A wonderful passage about that is:

**“Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny [thee], and say, Who [is] the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God [in vain].” (Proverbs 30:8-9)**

God, in His goodness, provides sun and rain for everyone, enemies included. He feeds them, and then they rebel against Him to His face: “When I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses.” (Jeremiah 5:7). One of the great follies in the world today is that we think we're so smart and technologically advanced that we no longer need God for survival. The reality is, He could cut your food supply off in an instant.

### **Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors**

As humans, our primary problem is sin, and our primary need is forgiveness. Without forgiveness, we are eternally damned, because we are all condemned sinners (see Romans 3). We have incurred a debt that we can never pay, but for those of us who believe in Christ, our sins are forgiven – the debt has been paid in full. The Lord has laid our iniquity on Himself (Isaiah 53:6), He has forgiven us and covered all our sin (Psalm 85:2), He has blotted out our

transgressions and will not remember them (Isaiah 43:25), He has cast our sins behind His back (Isaiah 38:17), He has removed our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12), He has cast our sins into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19), and He has sent our sins into a land not inhabited, never to be heard from again (Leviticus 16:21-22). By virtue of Christ, all sins that we have ever committed or ever will commit have been wiped away, and we have been declared not guilty. Amazing!

So why are we praying to be forgiven if we're already forgiven? Because we continue to sin. Whenever we sin, we cause a breach in our Father-child relationship with God, and we need to make it right. We've done some damage to the intimacy of that fellowship. In order to keep the joy of fellowship with God, we must confess and ask for forgiveness (see 1 John 1:9 and John 13:10). When David committed his great sin in the matter of Bathsheba, Nathan told him, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin." (2 Samuel 12:13). But after that, David nevertheless confessed His sin and asked for forgiveness. He wanted to be cleansed. He wanted the joy and gladness of salvation to be restored. He wanted to have a right spirit renewed in him. (See Psalm 32 and 51).

And even as Christ has forgiven us, we must forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32). The evidence that we've been forgiven is that we forgive. If we don't forgive one another like Christ forgave us, we're not going to be forgiven. We can't go into prayer while we're holding a grudge against someone and ask God to forgive us, and then expect Him to do it. You're all familiar with the parable of Matthew 18:23-35 of the servant who refused to forgive.

### **Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil**

If we're really saved, we're going to be as interested in avoiding future sins as we are in the forgiveness we've received for past sins. We do not want to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness (Jude 1:4) or use our liberty for an occasion to the flesh (Galatians 5:13). This is what this final petition is about. We have a promise that we'll never be given more than we can handle, and this petition is laying hold on that promise:

**"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*." (1 Corinthians 10:13)**

The word translated "temptation" can refer to a trial to test our virtue or a temptation to sin. We see this in Christ's temptation in Matthew 4 – from God's perspective, it was a trial to show the virtue of Christ; from Satan's perspective, he was trying to get Christ to sin. God doesn't tempt us to sin (James 1:13-15). This petition means "please keep us out of sin." Or to flesh that concept out, "I don't really want to go through trials because they aren't

pleasurable, but if it's needful for me to go through one, please let me rejoice in it and not fall into sin."

**"Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." (Matthew 6:16-18)**

Sam did a rather extensive sermon on fasting on August 14, 2016, so I'm not going to go over all of that again. But I'll give a few highlights. Fasting is abstinence from food for a spiritual reason. Scriptural fasting requires prayer, a purpose, and self-denial/-affliction. The only fast that God mandated in the Bible was the fast during the Day of Atonement, where "the Jews were to afflict themselves in acknowledgement of their sinfulness, and as a sign of true penitence, and their utter reliance upon the mercy of God." Any other fasting was personal, non-compulsory, and according to conscience. Fasting can be done as part of confessing sins, seeking strength, wisdom, help, and deliverance in the face of peril, or to help us remember our reliance on God. Don't fast for fleshly reasons, and then try to pretend that you're doing it for some spiritual reason. As in all things we do, fasting should be done toward God and for His glory, not for self-serving or strictly ritualistic purposes.

As mentioned above, the only fast mandated by God was during the Day of Atonement. Of course, we don't keep that day anymore, because "by His [that is, Christ's] own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." (Hebrews 9:12). But when it was kept, the fast happened one time per year. The Pharisees, true to form, had added their own rules on top of that, and required fasts twice per week (see Luke 18:12 – "I fast twice in the week."). And I read somewhere once that they fasted on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> days of the week. They had a holy-sounding reason for it, having something to do with doing it to commemorate the days of the week that Moses ascended and descended on Mt. Sinai. But the real reason was that the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> days were the market days, when the most people would be milling about, and they could get maximum exposure to their sad countenances and disfigured faces. I don't know how accurate those details are, but without a doubt, these hypocrites would make sure that people knew that they were fasting. Jesus warns us about this, and tells us that when we fast, we should look like we normally do – don't alter your appearance to draw attention to yourself.

To conclude, in matters of religious activity, Jesus is telling us to not put on a show. Don't do it for the sake of men. Don't do it for the reward of men. As in all things, if you do it with a heart towards glorifying God, then everything else will fall into place. I love you. Amen.