

The Worship of God and Prayer with Him

Continuing our thoughts on our relationship with God and our worship through the words of the Lord's Prayer.

The most important point to start on these subjects is to ask yourself, "What is my own personal relationship with God?" Why does that matter?

Let us look at some scripture to explain.

Jesus is talking to the people and the disciples about various actions for living a life pleasing to God, now His teaching has turned to prayer and worship of God.

The Jewish nation is very much centered upon religion and the worship of God, He had provided a set of instructions on how to worship Him for the Jewish Nation many years before, but, over time, their religious leaders had modified and added to these instructions.

Jesus starts the teaching by talking about how each person should worship, pray and fast and their personal attitude to the actions.

Helping others:

Matthew 6:1-4,

"1 Take heed that ye do not your alms (good deeds) before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

2 Therefore when thou doest thine alms (good deeds), 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.**

3 But when thou doest alms (good deeds), let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

4 That thine alms (good deeds) may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly."

In these verses Jesus puts much emphasis upon why a person, who appears to be worshipping, are in fact trying to become well known. They are carrying out their "act of love" to God in such a way as to impress other people? Jesus is telling the people not to carry out their worship and honour to God in such away that it will only impress other people, not God. Because this will not please God and therefore He will not bless the person.

Do not give "gifts, help or money" to the poor in such away that you are making sure everyone knows about your "generosity," even blowing a trumpet to announce your charity. This is a sign that you are an hypocrite,(acting or pretending to be someone you are not.) You may receive the glory of the people but not of God.

God sees all that we each do and why, if we help others in secret, God will reward openly.

Worship

The first point that Jesus asks, "to whom are you praying and worshipping? "do not your alms (good deeds, gifts) before men, to be seen of them:"

Matthew 6:5-8.

"5 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.

6 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.

7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. "

What is Jesus saying here? Some people, when they worship and pray, are out to impress, they think that God will respond better and faster to the more words they use .You therefore may ask? "Are these true believers? They do not appear to grasp how God responds and reacts to this behaviour " see verse 5,6.

Some people may ask, "if God knows all about us,why do we therefore pray?" God wants us to talk to Him, not just for our needs but in worship and praise for what He has done. Jesus prayed to the Father regularly and we are told to pray without ceasing, that does not mean all the time, but take your joys and problems to God at any time and anywhere, He is there listening and acting.

Important points on worship that Jesus warns about:

- 1) v5 Not to be a person who likes to be seen in their act of worship.
- 2) v7 Long prayers with little meaning, or using a ritual prayer, if you are repeating the words in a written prayer without actually meaning the words you are saying.
- 3) v7 Like others to hear their prayers. This could be an act of pride.
- 4) v6, When you pray it is a personal communication with God.
- 5) v8 God already knows what you need, He knows all about you, but He still wants you to talk to Him, He is always listening to any true prayers we make.

Always make sure that when you come to God the Father in prayer that there are no sins which would stand in the way of a close relationship with Him.

Worship through Fasting.

Matthew 6:16-18.

"16 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.

17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

18 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."

Jesus tells us to keep our fasting to ourselves, do not let pride take over. "Look at me, I am deliberately punishing myself by not eating."

The only act of fasting required by the Law of Moses was associated with the Day of Atonement. No work would indicate that no food preparation was allowed.

Leviticus. 23:26-32.

"26 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

27 Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD.
28 And ye shall do no work in that same day: for it is a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before the LORD your God.

29 For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people.

30 And whatsoever soul it be that doeth any work in that same day, the same soul will I destroy from among his people.

31 Ye shall do no manner of work: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

32 It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath."

The only other record of a regular fasting found in the Old Testament is Zechariah 7:1-7; from which it appears that throughout their period in captivity the Jews observed four annual times of fasting.

Zechariah 8,18,19

"18 And the word of the LORD of hosts came unto me, saying, 19 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace."

Each fast period was associated with a major event in the history of the Jews.

The capture of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans; Jeremiah 52:6-11.

The burning of the city and temple. Jeremiah 52:12ff.

The anniversary of the murder of Gedaliah Jeremiah 41:1,2 .

The siege of the holy city by Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah 52:4,5; 2 Kings 25:1,2

There was in addition to these the fast requested by Esther, Esther 4:1-17

There are additional records of public national fastings, they were usually because of the sin of the people or to request some divine favour of God.

1 Samuel 7:6;

"6 And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh."

2 Chronicles 20:3;

"3 And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. "

Jeremiah 36:6,7;

"6 Therefore go thou, and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the LORD in the ears of the people in the LORD'S house upon the fasting day: and also thou shalt read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities.

7 It may be they will present their supplication before the LORD, and will return every one from his evil way: for great is the anger and the fury that the LORD hath pronounced against this people. "

Nehemiah 9:1.

"1 Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sack clothes, and earth upon them.

2 And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. "

There were also many recorded local fasts.

(1.) Judges. 20:26; (2.) 2 Sam. 1:12; (3.) 1 Sam. 31:13; (4.) 1 Kings 21:9-12; (5.) Ezra 8:21-23; (6.) Jonah 3:5-9.

There are also many instances of private, personal, single occasion fasting

Exodus 24:18; Exodus 34:28; 1 Samuel. 1:7; 1 Samuel 20:34; 2 Samuel 3:35; 2 Samuel 12:16; 1 Kings 21:27; 1 Kings 19:8. Ezra 10:6; Nehemiah. 1:4; Daniel 10:2,3;

Our Lord fasted forty days in the wilderness, in preparation of the temptation by Satan, His physical human body had to be tested as well. Matthew 4:2.

In addition the scriptures have recorded that the act of fasting has been done for the wrong reasons and been abused by the person.

Isaiah 58:4-7; Jeremiah 14:11,12; Zechariah. 7:5,6.

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocritical or pretending illness or sadness with their acts of fasting, Matthew 6:16-18.

"16 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.

17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

18 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."

Luke 18:12-14.

"10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. 12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

What warnings did Jesus give to the religious leaders about their behaviour when fasting?

Do not dress or change your appearance in such away that shows you are fasting. You are not to be hypocritical, to be pretending, acting.

The act of fasting is not to get a reward or credit from God.

We should fast in secret.

God see's all behaviours and actions and knows the true meaning in a persons heart.

Make sure pride is not involved in the act of fasting.

Jesus never appointed the act of fasting. However, the early Jewish Christians, continued to observe the fasts according to the law of their fathers, Acts 13:3; Acts 14:23; 2 Corinthians 6:5.