

Jesus Taught About Prayer and Fasting

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to talk with God by learning the will of God from the Word of God, and then praying to God for the things that are His will. We saw that God knows the things we need and answers according to His will. In our topic today, we are going to see that Jesus gave an example of things for which we should pray.

Matthew 6:9-13 says, “In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as *it is* in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 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.” At a later time, in Luke 11:1, we read, “Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, *that* one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.’” In both passages, we see that Jesus taught the same basic areas for which we should pray.

Jesus showed that true prayer is based on a personal relationship with God. Jesus had just been talking about the empty prayers of the religious and the heathen. In contrast, in this prayer, we are reminded of the fact that we have a very personal relationship with God. He is our Father. Romans 8:14-15 says, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’” We are children of God. We received His Spirit at the moment we were adopted into His family. As a result, we have a very personal relationship with Him.

Jesus went on to give six areas for which we should pray. The first three recognize who God is and His will and work in the world. The second three deal with our personal needs. First, as we pray, we are to recognize that God is holy. The word translated “hallowed” means *to sanctify, to set apart or be holy* and is used 29 times in the New Testament. Jesus used this word three times in His prayer to the Father the night before He was crucified. John 17:17-19 says, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.” Jesus said He could sanctify us because He is Holy. He was totally committed to doing the will of the Father. Jesus prayed that His followers would be sanctified by His Word, because the Word of God is truth.

Second, we are to pray for the kingdom of God to come. At the present time, the kingdom of God is in our hearts. Jesus told the Pharisees, in Luke 17:20-21, “Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, “See here!” or “See there!” For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.’” In the present, we are to pray that we will know and do the will of God. In the future, the kingdom of God will be fully established when Jesus reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords. Third, we are to pray that the will of God will be done. That will happen as we submit ourselves to God. James 4:7 says, “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” As we submit to God, we are able to carry out His will and work in the world.

The last three things for which we should pray are our own personal needs. First, we are to pray for our daily

bread. Our heavenly Father knows what we need and He responds to meet our daily needs. However, we should also remember that there is a difference between wants and needs. 1 Timothy 6:6-8 says, “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.” The Lord knows what we need each day and He will supply those needs. Hebrews 13:5 says, “*Let your* conduct *be* without covetousness; *be* content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”

Second, we are to ask God to forgive us our debts. The word translated “debts” means *that which is legally due*. That word is also used in Romans 4:4, where we read, “Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.” If someone agrees to pay you a certain amount if you do a particular job for them, you expect them to pay their debt when the work is finished. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The Father freely forgave that debt at the moment we repented and came to Christ in faith. That is why we can experience forgiveness. As we pray, we are reminded that Jesus fully paid that legal debt.

Third, we are to pray and ask God not to lead us into temptation. James 1:13-15 says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” The word translated “deliver” means *to rescue or deliver*. God does not tempt us, but the Evil One (Satan) certainly does. We are to pray that the Lord will give us His strength to withstand that temptation.

Jesus went on to explain more about forgiveness when He said, in Matthew 6:14-15, “‘For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.’” If we know that we are Christians, we know that our sins have been forgiven. Jesus told the disciples, in John 13:10, “‘...He who is bathed needs only to wash *his* feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.’” At the moment we repented of our sin of unbelief, our sins were forgiven, removed as far as the east is from the west, buried in the depths of the sea, blotted out and God promised to remember them no more (no longer hold them against us). In 1 John 1:9, we are told, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” As Christ washed the feet of the disciples, He pointed out that it was like the cleansing. Confession of sins and forgiving others make it possible for us to live with a clear conscience, instead of continuing to have guilt about past sins. That is the cleansing we need day-by-day in order to enjoy our freedom in Christ.

Jesus then went on to talk about fasting. Matthew 6:16-18 says, “‘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. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 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.’” In these verses, we see another of the religious acts the Pharisees and others did to be seen by men. In both the Old and New Testament, we see that people fasted due to sorrow for sins, to spend time in prayer as they sought the will of the Lord and for other reasons. However, those who were hypocrites fasted for a different reason. When the hypocrites were fasting, they would try to appear to be sad and even disfigure their faces.

Those who were hypocrites fasted for the same reason they publicly gave gifts to the needy and prayed long prayers on the street corners. They fasted to be seen by other people. In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus gave a parable to

those who trusted that they were righteous in themselves. Luke 18:11-12 says, “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’” In these two verses, we see that this Pharisee did all three of the things mentioned in Matthew 6:1-18. He stood up and prayed in the temple courtyard where the people could see and hear him. He included in his prayer the fact that he fasted twice a week. He also included in his prayer the fact that he gave tithes to help the needy. However, Jesus said that he prayed with himself, instead of praying to God. Jesus also said that he could not make himself just. His only reward was the praise of men because God did not listen to his prayer.

Jesus went on to tell us what we should do when we fast. Jesus told His disciples that they should anoint their head and wash their faces just as they always did. In this way, no one except God would even know they were fasting. Jesus made it clear that whether a person was giving, praying or fasting, these things were to be done in such a way that the Father could see and reward, but not in a way that would cause other people to praise them. That is true for us and our children just as it was true for the disciples.

Jesus also gave a great promise if we give, pray and fast in secret. He said that the Father will see what we do and will reward us openly. In 1 Corinthians 3:11, we are told that Christ is our foundation on which we build. Then, it tells us in the following verses that our works are either like gold, silver and precious stone, or our works are like wood, hay and straw. These works will be tested by fire. 2 Peter 3:10 says, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.” Those works which are just for this earth will be destroyed. 1 Corinthians 3:14 says, “If anyone’s work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward.” Those works which have eternal value will be rewarded. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how they can have eternal rewards. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to seek eternal rewards.