

**Entrance into the Kingdom of God
And the Validity of Contemporary Judaism:
Jesus' View**

We continue our study today of one of Jesus' best known messages. His notoriety had spread throughout the land through His itinerant ministry, an unheard-of array of stunning miracles, as well as synagogue readings and declarations ("...today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," he said having read Isaiah 61:1-2a in Nazareth). Jesus' forerunner, John, announced the advent of the Kingdom of God in the person of the "Lamb of God." Jesus announced, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand... (Mark 1:15)."

The dominant question of the people of His day was this, "How do I enter this kingdom you are declaring." They knew it required righteousness, but where was it to be found. Are our religious leaders telling us truthfully the qualification for entrance into the kingdom? Is your "righteousness" and his "righteousness" the same?

- I. The Setting, 5:1-2
- II. The Introduction, 5:3-16
 - A. The Description of those already in the Kingdom, 5:3-12
 - B. The manner of life of those already in the Kingdom, 5:14-16
- III. The Clarification and the Thesis, 5:17-20
 - A. The clarification: Law is not mankind's problem, it was a misunderstanding of its function and the nature of human capacities. Jesus is not opposed to the instruction of Moses.
 - B. The thesis: Scribal and Pharisaic rituals are empty external substitutes resulting, not in righteousness, but in failure to enter God's kingdom. It is not what we do; it is about the accomplishments of the King for us!
- IV. The Argument Sustaining the Thesis, 5:21-7:6
 - A. The Scribes and Pharisees wrongly interpret the Scriptures, 5:21-48
 1. The Law, Jesus, and murder, 5:21-26
 2. The Law, Jesus, and adultery, 5:27-30
 3. The Law, Jesus, and divorce, 5:31-32
 4. The Law, Jesus, and deceptive speech, 5:33-37
 5. The Law Jesus, and vengeance, 5:38-42

- 6. The Law, Jesus, and discrimination, 5:42-47
- 7. Conclusion, 5:48
- B. The Scribes and Pharisees distort religious practices, 6:1-18

Not only did the Pharisees misinterpret the Law of God; they distorted the application of it in their religious practices. A mis reading of God's Word always leads to such. Jesus picks three religious practices to make His point: giving (1-4), praying (5-15), and fasting (16-18).

Jesus states what the Pharisees do, their motives and reward, then what His followers should do and their reward. There are several reoccurring words or phrases in the section: "hypocrite," "secret," "seen of men," and reward."

1. In the way they give, vv. 1-4

a. The wrong motive: "to be seen of men," v. 1a

The verse presents a general principle relative to religious practice. While religion must be outwardly manifested, it should be without ostentation or showmanship.

"The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do (Matt 23: 2-3)."

b. The wrong reward: to be seen of men," v. 1b-2

If executed for the applause and recognition of the observer, the recognition is the measure of the reward. When we manifest our religious commitments, it should be for God, not to be seen necessarily of people, certainly not to impress them of our piety.

"Sound no trumpet" may refer to the horn-shaped receptacles for donations in the temple, tossed coins causing an echoing effect. The great failure of the Pharisees is that they loved men's praise; they were self-centered. We have no record of a literal blowing of an instrument to announce giving in Jewish history. It may be that Jesus is speaking figuratively saying, "When you give, do not announce it."

c) The behavior to embrace, v. 3

The "hand" is not a thinking mechanism; it is a doing mechanism. Clearly, as in 5:29-30, it is figurative speech.

"Secrecy" is a figure of speech for privacy. Giving is to be done for the Lord, not for the praise of men. Planned giving is wise; that is not the issue here.

d) The promise of reward, v. 4

What a wonderful promise; the most important person in the world knows when we serve Him.

2. The way to pray, vv. 5- 15

The normal posture for prayer in first century Judaism was standing, though there are examples of kneeling and prostration.

a) The wrong motive, “to be seen of men,” v. 5a

b) The wrong reward, v. 5b

c) The correct behavior, v. 6a

The language is once more figurative; it is not necessary to have a private room set aside for prayer and only pray there.

The issue is the avoidance of public exhibitions.

d) The promise of reward, “will repay you,” v. 6b

e) The issue of the manner of praying, vv. 7-15

(1) The way not to pray, v. 7

The point is neither repetition nor length of prayers; we are not to babble. “Now I lay me down to sleep;” “Dear Lord Jesus be, thou our guest and let this food to us be blessed;” or “God is great, God is good ...” are fine prayers! It is about earnestness and focus.

(2) The reason not to pray that way, v. 8

This is rather wonderful; we are to pray in a certain manner because God is aware of our needs before we approach Him.

Parenthesis: If God knows our needs and prayer does not inform God [it is not about information transfer], why pray? Prayer is a mystery beyond human conception in how it works. If God knows before we ask and the answer is part of his eternal determination, why pray? [1] God commands us to talk to him. [2] It is a means of joining with the Lord in the outworking of his will. [3] Further, it is a means of expressing our devotion as well as our needs to God. It is a manner of releasing our concerns to God and trusting him to answer as he pleases. [4] It is a means of glorifying God in that it raises our awareness of his answers, since we asked, with the result that we praise him more for the answers. [5] God has willed to accomplish his will through our participation in his will. [6] In trusting that God tells the truth, prayer is a means of obtaining what we would not otherwise obtain.

(3) The way to pray, v. 9-16

This is a wonderful model (‘like this,’ v. 9) or structure for our prayer life. The ‘you’ is plural indicating that this is a

corporate prayer. There are six requests, three concerning God's interests and three of personal interest. The prayer presumes a relationship (v. 9) and reminds us that God is with us and above us. Again, the pronouns are plural in the prayer, indicating that it is a model for corporate prayer, not so much personal prayers. The first things to pray about are God's honor, kingdom, and purpose. Interestingly, there is no confession of sin, no thanksgiving offered to God, or intercession for others in the family and for the world. Further, the features of the instructions are its simplicity, conciseness, clarity, and comprehensiveness.

(a) That God be treated as holy, v. 9.

This is a clear statement that while the kingdom began to emerge in Jesus, it was not fully manifested, but it will come (there are stages in its visible manifestation, culminating in the eternal state). The prayer is that God's rule be consummated.

(b) That God's saving, royal rule be extended to all people, v. 10a

The request is that God's rule be consummated for his glory, not so much for our benefit.

(c) That God's will be done on earth, v. 10b

The essence of this petition is an amplification of the two previous requests that in Jesus' kingdom now His will be obeyed, and his kingship accepted.

The remaining three requests have to do with the corporate, personal needs of those who embrace kingdom affiliation and ideals. These three requests are interconnected, unlike the previous ones, by the 'and' in verses 12 and 13.

(d) That our needs be met, v. 11

The request is for the necessities reminding the hearer of the provision of manna in the wilderness. The issue is our daily needs (remember the birds [6:26]), not indefinite future needs.

(e) That our sin be forgiven, v. 12

This is the only petition singled out for comment at the end of the prayer, the point being that forgiveness is a reciprocal principle (vv. 14-15). The assumption is that

sin puts people at distance from God, as well as others.

The term used for sin is “debts” and it applies to those who have wronged us (“debtors”). It is mostly likely to be taken figuratively for wrongs done in general, not merely the failure to return what has been borrowed. It means any obligation. Forgiving others of wrongs done to us is an obligation because we have been forgiven a much larger “debt.”

(f) That we be delivered from temptation, v. 13a.

The point is not to be spared from testing, but from failing the test. Prayer presumes a relationship (v. 9) and reminds us that God is with us and above us.

(g) A concluding declaration of confidence in the Lord, v. 13b

“AMEN” is an expression of agreement or desire (“so be it,” “it is so”).

(h) An additional clarification, vv. 14-15

These verses seem to have been added later since the prayer-model ended. Likely Jesus sought to emphasize the issue of forgiveness.

These verses seem to be an expression of the issue of forgiveness further nuancing the implication of v. 12. Since the point of the verse is that we should forgive those who wrong us and that an unwillingness to forgive is sin on our part, God’s forgiveness of us should result in our forgiveness of others. Forgiveness by God results in a forgiving spirit. Thus, these verses state the reason that we should not withhold forgiveness from others. To not forgive the infractions of others is evidence that we have not been forgiven of God (‘will’ is future indicating the final judgment). Unwillingness to forgive may suggest an unrepentant heart!

Thoughts

1. While the expression of religion is often done in public, it must never be done to impress people. Faith is first a matter of inward affection and consequently of outward manifestation; it is neither first nor foremost

outward show. More importantly, in the context of our passage, the issue is the motive for outward pious exercises; it should never be to impress people. Do you find yourself proud of your religious piety? Do you give for people to notice? Do you pray publicly to gain an audience?

2. Prayer is an act of worship. What is important in prayer is the object, not the duration, posture, or profundity. Prayer is not a time to transfer information, as if God is unaware of what we know; it is a time to express intimacy with and dependence on God. Do you view prayer as an act of submission and adoration?
3. Prayer should have several components, though they vary in the number based upon urgency and circumstance. Prayer is foremost a form of adoration and dependence. We come to God recognizing his worth to lay our petitions before him with the knowledge that he is the source of our longings and needs. Is prayer for you a give-me session? It is worth meditating on the lines of this prayer, the six petitions, as a way for us to structure our praying. Is prayer a daily component in your spiritual life? It is how we respond to God, think about him, and worship him.