

## Matthew Six

Verses 1-4 (Using the Complete Jewish Bible by David Stern.)

*“Be careful not to parade your tzedakah in front of people in order to be seen by them! If you do, you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So, when you do tzedakah, don’t announce it with trumpets to win people’s praise, like the hypocrites in the synagogues and on the streets. Yes! I tell you, they have their reward already! But you, when you do tzedakah, don’t even let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Then your tzedakah will be in secret; and your Father, who sees what you do in secret, will reward you.”*

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 of Matthew are traditionally known as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is correctly explaining the instructions of God (Torah) to His disciples as evidenced by His repeated quotations. By this time in history the understanding of many of God’s instructions had been corrupted by religious leaders to the point that the life, love, and compassion of God for us that was originally inherent in those instructions had been brutally squeezed out (in His Name even). What was left was a lifeless, harsh and empty husk that was too heavy for the common man to bear. It seems evident to me that in this section of the Word Jesus is starting to “fill up” the Torah with life again as He says a little before this in 5:17 – “Don’t think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete.” Abolish (or destroy) meant to incorrectly explain His Word; complete (or fulfill) meant to correctly explain or interpret.

*Tzedakah* is a Hebrew word, pronounced sed-ah-kah, with the t giving the z a little sharper sound than is normal in English, sort of like a real short s sound. I believe Jesus would have used this word here, since he is a Hebrew and was talking to Hebrews. I think He is also teaching in the best tradition of rabbis in and around this time by comparing spiritual realities to the physical world through association (parables are another good example of this technique). He is delivering the Word in a way that preserves the life while making it easier to understand for those willing to implement it in his or her life.

The word tzedakah means “act(s) of righteousness,” and was understood to apply to any righteous action, but most specifically righteous actions inspired and guided by an understanding of the Torah. Technically, Torah was the first five of the books of the bible, but the rest of what is now called the Old Testament by some was also part of the Torah in its broadest sense. For the purposes of this discourse the whole of the recognized canon is considered Torah.

Jesus does not say, “don’t do acts of righteousness.” Rather, He is telling us in chapter 6 how to perform acts of righteousness. To do this He contrasts the behavior of the hypocrite with what the behavior of the disciples should be. In this context a hypocrite was (and is) a person that acts in a manner inconsistent with the Torah (which the

hypocrite was teaching). The disciple on the other hand should act in a manner consistent with the meaning of Torah.

The hypocrite may actually perform a right act, but his motivation is corrupted by a desire to gain something for himself. Many times people ask, "What's in it for me?" when they have the opportunity to perform a righteous act. For instance, some people will not give money unless they get a tax deduction. Jesus points out later (in 7:21-23) what the hypocrites will say and what they will actually obtain. Pay attention to the fact that in 7:23 He says that they are "workers of lawlessness" which is the meaning of the KJV word "iniquity" (the Greek word is *anomia* meaning no law or no Torah).

*"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants. On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?' Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!'"*

Many of these hypocrites "did" actions not only to earn praise at the moment, but also to earn something from God later such as entrance into His Kingdom. Many present day hypocrites do the same things for the same reasons. The righteous act of a hypocrite may be real, like giving money to the poor, but he obtains his reward when he gets his public acclaim because that was what motivated the hypocrite. But there will be no reward for that action given later by God as the hypocrite might expect.

For the follower of God, acts of righteousness will become so automatic that they will be performed without thinking of a reward. When those who follow God perform an act of righteousness in such a way as to be unaware of the benefit to him or herself (the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing), then it is "secret" (not recognized by men) and God will give the reward.

Jesus goes on in verses 5 through 14 to outline another tzedakah:

*When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites, who love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners, so that people can see them. Yes! I tell you, they have their reward already! But you, when you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, don't babble on and on like the pagans, who think God will hear them better if they talk a lot. Don't be like them, because your Father knows what you need before you ask him. You, therefore, pray like this:*

*Our Father in heaven!  
May your Name be kept holy.*

*May your Kingdom come,  
Your will be done on earth as in heaven.  
Give us the food we need today.  
Forgive us what we have done wrong,  
As we too have forgiven those who have wronged us.  
And do not lead us into hard testing,  
But keep us safe from the Evil One.  
For the kingship, power and glory are yours forever. Ahmain.*

*For if you forgive others their offences, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others their offences, your heavenly Father will not forgive yours.”*

Jesus is still teaching on tzedakah, and again contrasts the behavior of the hypocrite with that of His disciples. Rather than seeking praise for the pious act of public prayer, the disciple is to pray quietly and privately. But here He also includes the contrast of the behavior of pagans, or those who think they can reach God by the mere repetition of syllables. Many people even now repeat words over and over as if somehow they will be able to make their god do something because of the incessant repetition of syllables. Some use the name “Jesus” so many times it is reminiscent of pagan ecstasy rituals.

Consider this: A pagan could be considered a person without God. A disciple or child of God is someone who has or knows (intimately) His Father. A hypocrite would therefore be a person who thinks and talks like he or she has God but acts as if he or she is a pagan (does not have or know God intimately).

Jesus says that God already knows what we need, and the implication is that He will give it to His children. Therefore the type of praying we are to do is private and should consist mainly of recognition, an earnest desire for the will of God to be done everywhere, thanksgiving, blessing and forgiveness (requested on the basis of forgiveness of others).

Notice the balance of the sample prayer that Jesus gives. The first line of a pair makes a statement; the second line enhances and expands on the meaning of the first line.

Being forgiven in the same manner in which we forgive goes along with other parts of scripture such as the “Ungrateful Servant” (who was forgiven a large debt but did not forgive a smaller debt) and such statements as those from Jesus in Mat. 7:1

*“...the measure with which you measure out will be used to measure to you.”*

In verses 19 through 24, Jesus continues the theme of tzedakah but pivots to focus on types of rewards for tzedakah and where to store them:

*“Do not store up for yourselves wealth here on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and burglars break in and steal. Instead, store up for yourselves wealth in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and burglars do not break in or steal. For where your wealth is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. So if you have a ‘good eye’ (that is, if you are generous) your whole body will be full of light; but if you have an ‘evil eye’ (that is, if you are stingy) your whole body will be full of darkness. If, then, the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can be slave to two masters; for he will either hate the first and love the second, or scorn the second and be loyal to the first. You can’t be a slave to both God and money.”*

Picking up the thread of heavenly rewards, Jesus contrasts physical rewards with those stored in heaven that are earned by performing acts of righteousness in the way He is teaching. The heavenly bank account has treasure that cannot be destroyed, but the rewards gained here stay here and are destroyed in spite of efforts to keep them intact.

I think Jesus is pointing out that the heart will be inclined to dwell where the wealth is kept. If your treasure is here, that is where your heart will be also. If your treasure is in heaven, then your heart will be oriented in that direction. The disciple or child of God will be motivated to build and protect that heavenly treasure, constantly thinking of ways to increase the gain. If we continue to perform acts of righteousness in the manner that Jesus describes then God will increase our heavenly rewards. It is up to Him to decide if, how much, and when. We do not need to be concerned with amounts, we just keep trying to do what He wants us to do to the best of our ability, energized and helped out by the Spirit where needed. We are motivated by love of the Father and others, and that is it’s own reward.

The eye is to the body as a lamp is to a room. The eye illuminates the way for the body so we don’t trip and fall. It also illuminates the needs of those around us. If we meet those needs in a generous fashion we can exchange earthly treasure that will be destroyed for heavenly coin that cannot be destroyed. But if we try to hold on to physical treasure and ignore the needs of those around us, then we are full of darkness, and there is not much that can be done to help the situation. For if a person with eyesight refuses to see, more eyesight (light) will not help him or her and the light is the same as darkness.

We cannot have a devotion to gaining earthly rewards and a devotion to God at the same time. Having two masters is the same as being double-minded or lukewarm (a mixture of two opposing principles), a condition that God does not approve of. We must serve Him with all our heart, mind, and strength, giving Him a whole-hearted effort in everything we do.

Jesus continues in verses 25 through 34 to expand on the idea of tzedakah and material gain:

*Therefore, I tell you, don't worry about your life – what you will eat or drink; or about your body – what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds flying about! They neither plant nor harvest, nor do they gather food into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they are? Can any of you, by worrying, add a single hour to his life? And why be anxious about clothing? Think about the fields of wild irises, and how they grow. They neither work nor spin thread, yet I tell you that not even Shlomo in all his glory was clothed as beautifully as one of these. If this is how God clothes grass in the field – which is here today and gone tomorrow, thrown in an oven, - won't he much more clothe you? What little trust you have! So don't be anxious, asking, 'What will we eat?' 'What will we drink?' or 'How will I be clothed?' For it is the pagans who set their hearts on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all. But seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Don't worry about tomorrow – tomorrow will worry about itself! Today has enough tsuris already!*

It seems as though Jesus takes up a connecting thread between the public actions of the hypocrite being performed for selfish gain and the perceived requirement for collecting that gain in order to provide for needs. The idea I think Jesus is going for here is that some people worry so much about physical necessities that they forget about God's righteousness, and attempt to obtain wealth so they can buy what they think God won't provide.

In opposition to this Jesus is making another point already hinted at in verses 19 through 24 - that the disciple will make the righteousness of God (tzedakah) their goal and the needs of the disciple will be taken care of by the Father. The righteousness of God and our acts of righteousness should match. His argument pivots on the statement concerning the lack of trust. Trust is the same as "trusting obedience" which is the definition of faith. If we truly "trust" God (simply obey His instructions), then we know He will provide for us, and we shouldn't seek to satisfy our own needs at whatever the cost. We concentrate on doing what He asks of us and let Him take care of the needs and the rewards.

He knows what we need because He built us to have those needs so that we would understand that we need Him in the same way. Without Him providing Life to us we would die. He is the source of all good and holy and right sustenance, and separation from Him is like cutting ourselves off from air or water or food.

Of course we have to work to provide for our needs and the needs of our family and those less fortunate than ourselves. That is also part of what God asks us to do (remember, the

Sabbath command says to work six and rest one). Jesus says of himself that He and His Father are still working (John 5:17). But I think Jesus is showing the difference between (essentially) dishonest work (seeking selfish gain) and honest work (seeking righteous gain – His kingdom and His righteousness).

Jesus is our righteousness, and the foundation of any righteous act we attempt. Without His sacrifice, any “good work” we do is worthless in the sense of gaining right standing with God. We cannot do enough right acts to bridge the gap between our sinful selves and God. The right act can and does have some positive benefit, but not enough to “buy” complete right standing before God.

I do not think Jesus is here outlining what it takes to obtain right standing with God, but behavior required by the disciple after the fact. Those who are now children of the Father have appropriated the sacrifice of Jesus and the basic issue of right standing before God is settled. It now remains for us to show our love in return by obedience to the Father’s instructions (all of Torah) and doing “right acts” to, and with, each other.

God treats us in the same manner that Jesus is teaching here. He gives to all of us, saved and unsaved, abundant blessings in the form of air to breath, light to see by and warm us, ground and seed to grow food with, the company of other people to enjoy, and the possibility of an intimate relationship with Him with all the untold riches that brings. And people in general pretty much ignore what He provides and corrupt it to their own ends, giving glory to their own selves by the worship of intellect or created things.

Too many times the supposed “saved” person says that because the sacrifice comes without charge, and there is nothing I can do to obtain it, then I don’t have to do anything after I have it either. This is twisted reasoning of the worst sort. What the disciple should, instead, be saying is that since God has given so great a gift (Rom. 6:23; 2Cor 9:15), how can I return to Him anything less than all I have? Praise be Adonai, Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, who in the Messiah has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heaven!

The Lord Bless You and Keep You  
Bruce