

# The Book of Matthew

## Portraying Jesus Christ our King

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## MATTHEW 6

### The Practice of Righteousness

#### Study Notes & Comments...

Chapter 5 spoke to what the inner attitudes of Jesus' disciples should be. Chapter 6 will speak to how our inner attitudes should effect our outward appearance.

First, do note that Jesus starts out here by talking specifically about **how to practice righteousness**. What does the word *practice* imply? When you practice the piano, what are you doing? You are working at it, continuing to improve, striving for perfection. There is a goal – to play perfectly, full of heart and song. Practicing righteousness is much the same – it's something we continue to develop, striving for perfection. It implies an ongoing work, not something you do once and then you are done. Think about that, and then consider how *you* go about practicing righteousness. Do you practice every day? Or just once a week on Sundays? If you practiced the piano as often as you practice righteousness, how good of a pianist would you be? Food for thought.

- 1) 6:1-4: When we practice righteousness, we aren't to do it with appearances in mind. Our motive should not be to impress others with our 'Christian-ness'. If we do a good thing just so someone will pat us on the back, that pat on the back is the only reward we'll receive! There will be no eternal reward. There is an easy way to check your motives to see if you're really doing something for the Lord or not. Ask yourself, **would you still do this good deed if you knew that no one else would ever know you did it?**

Jesus goes on in verse 2-4 to contrast proper righteousness against the righteousness of the 'hypocrites.' **We are not to call attention in any way to our good works.** Instead, we are to do these things quietly, so that only our Father in heaven knows. Does this mean we *purposefully* hide our good deeds? No, not necessarily. It simply means we don't call attention to them. We avoid putting ourselves in situations where we might be tempted to take the glory for something that should instead give glory to God.

- 2) 6:5-6: In relation to prayer, the same is true. Praying in public can be tough - it's hard to pray without trying to 'sound good' or 'pray well' in front of others. Jesus instructs us to **go somewhere to pray where we won't be tempted to play-act**. If we find a quiet place by ourselves to pray, we can be sure our prayer is directed toward God and not man. Jesus isn't saying we can't pray in public, only that we need to be careful of our motives when we do. **It would be a good idea to practice praying in private a lot.** This will help ensure a humble heart when we pray in public.
- 3) 6:7-8: In regards to praying with "meaningless repetition," Jesus here is contrasting proper prayer with the prayers of heathen 'Gentiles' to pagan gods. The latter (particularly the Greeks living in the area) used ritualistic repetition and chants like a magical incantation. Jesus instructs us as his

disciples to have *meaningful* prayer, not pointless, heartless, religious-speak. Remember, you have a two-way *relationship* with God. **Our prayers should reflect that there is, in fact, a relationship.**

We also need to remember that God knows our needs. We don't have to pray the same thing to Him over and over to make sure He gets it or doesn't forget about it. In reality, prayer is for *our* benefit, so that *we* might be open to what *He* is saying. **Prayer is as much for talking as it is for listening.**

- 4) 6:9-13: Jesus now gives us a model for prayer. This passage is most commonly referred to as "The Lord's Prayer," which is a misnomer because it isn't the Lord's prayer, it's a model for ours:

**Our Father, who is in heaven...** The relationship aspect is established right away. We are God's child, and He is our loving Father. As our Father in heaven He provides for us, disciplines us, and gives us footsteps to follow in. This concept of God as 'Father' was completely new to the disciples listening to Jesus' words at the time. To call upon God in the same way a child calls upon his father would have been a mind-blowing concept to them.

**Hallowed is Your Name...** God's name is Holy. We acknowledge His Holiness and give Him glory. **Your Kingdom come,** A statement of fact. God's Kingdom will come as a physical reality.

**Your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven...** The purpose of prayer is to establish God's will, not our own will, on earth. God gives us the opportunity to participate in what HE is doing. We pray that God's perfect purpose will be accomplished on earth, just as it is in Heaven.

**Give us this day our daily bread...** Lord, provide for us. It's a misconception to think that *we* provide for our family and ourselves. God is the one who provides. We just benefit from His blessings!

**And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors...** The Greek word for debt here implies sin. In other words, the prayer is: "Forgive us our sin, as we forgive those who sin against us." Have you forgiven? In this prayer, we are asking the Lord to forgive us to the degree that we forgive others. (See v.14-15 below)

**And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil...** The Greek word used here for temptation is *peirasmos*. It means 'to prove by testing or trial.' Temptation is an unfortunate translation, as God does not lead us to temptation, but he *does* test us (1 Peter 1:3-9). Finally, the word *evil* is used in such a way to denote a *title* in the Greek – thus *The Evil One* is more accurate. Thus, an accurate translation of this sentence would be "do not lead us into testing, but deliver us from the evil one." (1 Cor. 10:13) I would suggest this portion of the prayer *might* be forward-looking and could be applied to Rev. 3:10 and Rev. 14:7. Thus, this becomes a plea that we would escape the "hour of testing" and judgement that will come upon the earth. The same Greek word is used in Rev. 3:10, though in that instance it's translated correctly as 'testing.'

**Yours is Kingdom, Power, Glory....** The prayer ends in worship, as all prayer should.

Note that the Lord did not give us this prayer so we could recite it over and over like an incantation. Jesus did not intend that these be the *exact words* we pray (Matt 6:7), just that they be a model for us. In this prayer God is glorified, we acknowledge His sovereignty, we pray for forgiveness, and we thank Him for his provision. **It's only intended to show us the proper perspective to pray from.**

- 5) 6:14-15: The subject of forgiveness is amplified here. It's so important that we learn to forgive one another. Unforgiveness grows into bitterness, and bitterness can totally consume us. It effects the words we say, our attitudes, and our whole outlook on life. **Being unwilling to forgive others shows how little we really appreciate the forgiveness God has granted us.** If we really recognize our own sin before God, and understand the degree to which God went to forgive us of that sin, we should respond by granting others that same grace and mercy (Eph. 4:31-32, Col. 2:12-15).
- 6) 6:16-18: Jesus now moves onto the act of fasting, that is, denying oneself food. The idea behind fasting is that during this time you are focused entirely on the spiritual, rather than the physical. It

should be a time of prayer, a time of utter devotion to God. It is a time to pray, and to listen, to hear what the Lord might have to say to you about your walk with Him.

Here again, Jesus contrasts proper fasting with how hypocrites use it for show. Fasting is between you and God. You don't walk around with your face downcast telling people "Oh, I'm so hungry, I've been fasting. Look how much I'm suffering for the Lord." There is no reason for anyone else to even know about it. Jesus' point is that we should not call attention to our "suffering," but that we should do it in secret. In verse 17 Jesus says, "wash your face" so that no one will detect anything is different.

- 7) 6:19-21: Jesus contrasts treasure on earth with treasure in heaven. Earthly treasures are temporary and quickly evaporate. Eternal treasures, however, last forever. What treasures are you investing in?

Do you ever just sit and think of eternity? It's a very long time! Our life here is so brief, so short, and yet we grasp at material things as if they can somehow sustain us. They simply can't! All of this around us is going to pass away. Only those things that are eternal will remain! So, the question is, what *eternal* treasures have you laid up in heaven? When you arrive at your eternal destination, will you be broke? Or are you taking every opportunity now to invest your time, money, and energy in God's Kingdom so that when you do arrive, *eternal* treasure is waiting for you? If your treasures are here on earth, that's where your heart will be. But if they are in heaven, they'll last forever! Have a heavenly heart!

- 8) 6:22-24: Jesus continues on this theme. Are you focused on the dark or on the light? **What kind of "sight" do you have?** Where are your eyes directed? Are you seeing clearly into the eternal? Or are you focused on the worries of this world, dark and dismal? **If the light of your life is the darkness of this world, how dark your life will be!** (v.23) Take off the blinders! Focus on Jesus and clear the mud out of your eyes!

Jesus concludes by saying you cannot serve both God and possessions (mammon). Are you a slave to Christ or a slave to your possessions? Does Jesus dictate your daily walk? Or does your desire for money, fame, and recognition have more influence? **You cannot serve in the kingdom of light if the world of darkness possesses you.** Do not allow yourself to become a servant to the desires of this world.

- 9) 6:25-34: *"For this reason (all of the above)...don't worry about your life."* That is the message of the rest of this chapter. **Jesus encourages us to have a heavenly perspective, not an earthly one.** We don't need to worry about food or clothing, for our Father in heaven loves and cares for us (see Luke 11:11-13). Jesus makes an important point in v.32. **If we are chasing after the worries of this world, how will we be any different from unbelievers?** In part, what makes us, as Christians, distinct from the world is the very fact that we KNOW that we can rely on our Father in heaven to care for us. We aren't driven by the need to satisfy the flesh, because we understand that all things work for the good for those who love the Lord. We understand that He will take care of us.

The important thing we should be doing, rather than worrying, is *practicing* righteousness, that is, seeking after the kingdom of God. I really like how the New Living Translation sums up verse 33: "Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs, and He will give you *all you need* from day to day if you *live for Him* and *make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.*"

**Is the Kingdom of God your primary concern?** Don't be so preoccupied with what you're NOT getting. Be thankful for what God is giving, and let your satisfaction in Him be an example to the unbelievers around you.

# MATTHEW 7

## The Practice of Righteousness, Part II

### Study Notes & Comments...

Chapter 7 wraps up the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ discourse, and continues the theme of practicing righteousness from chapter 6 (6:1). This chapter is broken into two parts, the first emphasizing the proper attitudes of Christian living, the second containing warnings to those who give ‘lip service’ to God.

- 1) 7:1-2: Jesus here, warns about being judgmental of others. Please note that this does *not* mean that we, as Christians, cannot be *discerning* about others attitudes and actions (Jesus addresses this in v.15-20). What Jesus is saying here, is that **we should not have an attitude that places ourselves in a haughty position above others** (as the Pharisees did). The Lord’s message to us is: watch your heart. Do not have a critical heart. Only God can truly and rightly judge others, for only he can see the heart and motive of a person.

The Lord then warns us that to the degree we judge others, we ourselves will be judged. In like manner, as Jesus taught previously, if we are merciful to others, the Lord will show us mercy. If we forgive others, we will be forgiven. In the same way, if we judge others critically, we will be critically judged. (See Matt 5:7, 6:14-15).

- 2) 7:3-5: Jesus continues.... It is *so much easier* to see sin in others than it is to see it in ourselves. Chances are good that if you see a sinful behavior or attitude in another person that irritates you, you yourself, to some degree, probably exhibit that same behavior. Before you go pointing fingers at someone else (as a Pharisee would), examine yourself very carefully.

Notice the great contrast Jesus uses in his illustration in verse 3: “Why do you look at the *speck* in your brothers’ eye, but do not notice the *log* in your own eye?” If we have a critical heart, we will find and judge people for small offenses all the while ignoring our own, much larger offenses against God! Jesus tells us simply: **deal with your own sin before you try and help others with theirs**. If we don’t, others will see our hypocrisy. It’s pretty hard to miss a log sticking out of someone’s eye!

Again, none of this is to say that we should not approach our brothers and sisters in Christ if we feel the Lord is leading us to speak to them about a behavior, sin, or attitude that is not reflecting the Lord. **But we must do so carefully, in prayer, humbly and with love**. If our attitude is one of condemnation then we will do absolutely no good. See **Gal. 6:1-5** and James 5:19-20.

- 3) 7:6: The picture here is this: If you give pearls to a pig, the pig will try to eat it (because what else is a pig going to do?) and then, finding it distasteful, spit it out and trample it. A hungry pig is not concerned with the true value of a pearl. It doesn’t know any better.

The pearl in this illustration, I believe, represents the message of the kingdom of God – the good news of salvation and God’s intervention to save men from sin. (Matt 13:45-46). The dogs and swine are those who simply cannot understand the value of the kingdom, who outright reject the gospel because they are more concerned with feeding and satisfying their flesh than they are hearing the truth. Jesus gives us a warning here: there are people who want nothing to do with the kingdom. Don’t force the issue with them, because if we do, even if we mean well, they will tear us to pieces. Remember, it’s the Holy Spirit that works on hearts, not we ourselves. Just speak the truth and then let the Spirit do the work. Sometimes we feel like it’s our job to “get people saved.” It’s not. Our job to demonstrate Christ to others and to speak the truth. God is the one who does the saving.

- 4) 7:7-11: These verses speak to the very *personal* relationship with have with our Father in heaven. **Jesus encourages us to ask, to seek, and to knock on a *continual* basis.** In the Greek, these verbs are all present tense – showing an ongoing action. We don't ask just once, we *keep on* asking. We don't seek an answer from the Lord for just one day, we *keep on* seeking. If we *continuously* come before the Lord in prayer, Jesus promises we will find the answers we seek. It is in this process of seeking that our faith is tested, and it is by this testing that we come to recognize the sovereignty of God. Our Father in heaven is, even now, in the process of working out what is *best* for us. He has good things ahead for us! But good things, eternal things, take *time*. Don't tire of praying, Don't tire of seeking out the Lord! **As you pray, let the Spirit reveal to you, over time, what it is God is doing,** and watch and be amazed as the Lord answers your prayers!
- 5) 7:12: "Therefore...." In regards to everything I have just spoken (comprised in Matt 5-7), "whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them." Commonly referred to as the 'golden rule', this *active* approach of doing good to others summarizes the words of the Law and the Prophets. Note: **Is is far more of a challenge to do good to others *before* they do good to you than it is to do good to others *because* they do good to you.** We are to do good to others irregardless of whether they do good in return.

The second half of chapter 7 deals with the *proof* of the kingdom of God. How do we know who or what is of the kingdom and who or what is not? How do we know what is true?

- 6) 7:13-14: **The way that leads to salvation is very narrow.** In fact, there is only **one way** anyone can be saved – through the gate that is Jesus Christ (See **John 10:9**, **Acts 4:12**). *Any* other way leads to death. If we are confronted by talk about spiritual (but worldly) things, it is very easy to go along for the ride, to not rock the boat, to just blend in, to nod our heads in agreement but keep our mouths shut. It is a hard thing, however, to go against the grain, to stand out in a crowd, or to speak against the majority view. Christian living *requires* that we be a light shining in the darkness, and that we be the salt of the earth (Matt 5:13-16). If we *truly* are living for the Lord, walking in obedience, the people around us will know it. They will look at us and they may say we are narrow-minded. To that I say, yes, I am narrow minded, because "the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." (v.14)
- 7) 7:15-20: Jesus warns that false teachers will disguise themselves as 'sheep.' If they are in disguise, how can we tell the difference between a real teacher and a pretender? **Jesus says we can distinguish the two by the fruit they bear.** A bad tree cannot produce good fruit.

Distinguishing the two might seem complex or even confusing, but in reality, it's not. For example: does the church or religious organization you belong to teach you to put your trust in Jesus *alone*? What's the central theme you hear taught at your church? Is it God's mercy and grace? Is it the saving power of Jesus? Or do you hear repetitive pleas for money? The power of positive thinking? or the necessity of following certain rules and regulations?

Remember, **if a church pastor or leader truly is of the Lord, he will reflect the qualities of Jesus.** He will glorify Jesus and the Father in the things he does and says. He will not be self-seeking, selfish, or motivated by money. He will not be a man of pride. He will not be vain. He will teach from the Word of God with a humble heart. **He will be the picture of a servant.** Watch out for pastors or teachers who use their position to elevate themselves or to fill their ego!

**The fruit of the Spirit** is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (**Gal 5:22-23**). These are the qualities your pastor, or anyone in claims to be a Christian, should exhibit.

Now we are, of course, human and so we do all make mistakes. None of us are perfect. However, if you see your pastor behaving in a way contrary to fruit of the Spirit on a regular basis, do not be afraid to talk to him about it. Approach him in love. Measure his response. Is his response one of humility? One that admits wrongdoing and asks for forgiveness and your prayers? Or is it one that evades the question, exhibits pride, or casts the blame for the problem on *you*?

The human heart is, by its nature, self-seeking and self-motivated. **A heart under the control of the Holy Spirit is pure, loving, patient, and faithful.** You can determine whether someone is a 'pretender' by the way their actions express the nature of their heart.

- 8) 7:21-23: **The key to entry into heaven isn't what we say** with our mouth, it's **how we obey** our Lord. Anyone can say "I'm a Christian," but **how many really, truly live a life that reflects obedience to God?** Does your light really shine in this dark world or are you covering it up so no one will see it? If you hide it under day-to-day conditions with your friends, family or at work, can you really say with any confidence that you've given your whole life to the Lord? Think about it. Pray about it.

Verse 22 and 23 teach us an important fact: **miracles done in the name of the Lord do not validate the ministry of the one performing the miracle.** In Matthew 24:24, Jesus tells us false prophets will perform miracles that will deceive the world. You can not judge a ministry by the number or quality of miracles performed. You can only discern the truth about a ministry by the fruit that is born out of it.

In verse 22 and 23 we see a scene from the Day of Judgement. In verse 22, we see miracle workers who gave lip service to the Lord, but in reality were in it for themselves. Their question, "Did *we* not prophecy in Your name..." reflects boastful hearts, in my view.

**Important:** Note that on the Day of Judgement it is Jesus who is doing the judging. There are those who teach that Jesus never claimed to be God. A simple reading of the text testifies to the truth of the matter. **Jesus *did* claim to be God, on numerous occasions!** This is one of them.

- 9) 7:24-27: The key to these verses is the following: "**Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them....**" What words are Jesus referring to? Everything in Matthew 5-7 – the entire Sermon on the Mount. For the people of the kingdom of God, these chapters are of utmost importance, for they teach us and remind us, how to *practice* righteousness (see comments on Matt 6:1). **Jesus' words require action.** Matthew 5-7, in my view, provide us as Christians with a guidebook for living day to day the way the Lord would have us live - in a manner that glorifies Him.

There are two different kind of "Christians:" Those who act on the words of Jesus, and those who do not. Those who do not, like the foolish man in Jesus' parable (v.26-27), might think simply hearing and nodding in agreement might save them, but when the storms come, they will find themselves rooted in nothing of substance. Their world quickly falls apart. Christian living requires obedience. **It requires hearing and action.** In that action we build a life founded on the rock.

Now you wonder if I'm beginning to teach a doctrine of salvation by works. No, I'm not. We are saved by God's grace alone, and nothing that we can do ourselves (Eph. 2:8). That is absolute truth. But *true* repentance does require a change of heart, and if a heart truly belongs to God, that heart will earnestly seek to honor Him. That's my point, and one of Jesus' points here as well. **A true believer will bear good fruit in the kingdom.** If we say we belong to the Lord, but do not bear good fruit for the kingdom, it's difficult to imagine how any real change of heart has occurred.

10) 7:28-29: When Jesus started this teaching (in 5:1), he was sitting with just his disciples. By the end of the sermon, however, crowds had gathered to where he was (8:1). His teaching astonished these crowds! Jesus taught with absolute authority! Look at it this way: if I wrote a book, who could teach the book to others better than I? No one. I could teach it with absolute authority, as I was the author. The words came from my own mind. In a like manner, God is the author of the scripture. Who could teach it better? No one! **Jesus taught the scripture with absolute authority as he was the author!**