

“Loving God”

A Sermon for the Family of God

Matthew 6:1-18

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Jeff: Our heavenly Father, we are thankful to gather here in this place. And we know that thankfulness is one of those key things that we’re called to do as Christians. We’re called to be thankful and joyful, mindful in prayer, not because of the particular situation, but because of Your Son the Lord Jesus Christ, in any situation. So Father, as we gather before You today, we express our thanksgiving and our joy because we’re firmly situated in the Lord Jesus Christ. And as we stand in Him, we offer up our prayers.

And Father, we think about Bruce and Becky today. Father, we ask for this next surgery to go well, not just in the way the doctors work and the way that Bruce recovers, but we pray that it would go well in the sense that it would relieve him of his pain. We pray that it would go well in the sense that he’s able to stand and walk around with ease again. And we pray, Father, knowing that You often use means to bring about Your will. We pray that You will use these means for his good. So Father, we lift him up to You and ask on his behalf this morning. But not only his, but for his wife Becky. And we pray, Father, that You will bless her and strengthen her as she is an encouragement to him. And we pray, Father, that You’ll bless them both.

Lord, we pray for Debbie Painter, and ask that You will mend her body. We pray, Father, that You would encourage her heart and her spirit. Father, we pray that she’ll be encouraged by the simple fact that God’s people are praying for her. Father, we pray for Albert and for his struggle and his battle with cancer. We pray, Father, that You will bless him not only physically in the overcoming of this disease, but also spiritually. Lord, we pray that You will minister to him in his heart and spirit. Father, we pray for Gil. We lift him up to You, asking that Your hand would be upon him, that You will bless him in the midst of these treatments, and that You will do a wonderful work in him, not just physically but spiritually. Father, we just pray that Your hand would be upon him for good. And we pray that You’ll use his friends and his family who know you in his life for good.

Father, we ask all of these things as we turn to You in Your word and seek Your guidance. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Jeff: Okay. Well why don’t we turn to Matthew chapter 6 this morning? Matthew chapter 6. And we’ll get to the reading of that in just a minute.

I want to give you a little bit of an over view again of what we’ve been doing. And this overview of these six sessions really does follow The Sermon on the Mount, and how I have that divided. But today we’re going to look at some lessons in loving God. And you’ll notice that this forms what I’ve talked to you about in the past, the chiasm, which is an A. B., B. A. form. So you have lessons in loving others—A.--, lessons in loving God—B.--, and then we’ll return to lessons in loving God—B.—again, and then lessons in loving others—A. And so there’s a chiasm within The Sermon on the Mount itself.

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And we shouldn't be surprised at that. The last time we were together we explored that first part of The Sermon on the Mount, verses 17-48, and those six topics, noticing that they're not just six random topics gathered by our Lord and sort of the first things that came to His mind. But they were things that He had not only thought about. But He also thought about how He might work them together in the sermon, so that not only in the message itself and in the substance of what He said would there be a message, but also in the way that He communicated it. And that's oftentimes the way you find it working out in the Scriptures.

Well here's The Sermon on the Mount in case you don't have the outline that I gave you the last time. You notice that we have the blessings or the Beatitudes and the cursings that come at the end in chapter 7, verses 13-27. But here, starting in chapter 5 verse 17, and working on through chapter 7 verse 12, you find that chiasm—loving others, loving God, loving God, loving others.

I might mention this. I don't know if I've mentioned it yet. But I might mention now that what you find interestingly enough at the beginning of the sermon, at the beginning of the body of the sermon, you find the phrase *“the Law and the Prophets.”* And at the end of The Sermon on the Mount, at the end of the body in 7:12, you find that same phrase, *“the Law and the Prophets.”* And so again, another indication that The Sermon on the Mount is a highly structured piece. And we're looking at a sermon that is not just content rich, but is also structurally rich. And so those are things that I would just point out along the way as we think about The Sermon on the Mount. Some of the beauty of it is not just in what it says but in how it says it.

So why don't we look at chapter 6 today? And we'll look together at verses 1-18, 6:1-18. So let me read to you the word of the living God, for indeed it is God's living Word.

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them. For then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

“Pray, then, like this. 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

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forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. For they disfigure their faces, that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others, but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” All right. That is—

Participant: The word of the Lord.

Jeff: I was just going to say that. *(Laughter)*

Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: I was just going to say that today. *(Laughter)* But then I messed up because I know that I forgot there was a response. Sorry about that. *(Laughter)*

All right. Well let me talk to you a little bit this morning about our introduction and what we’re going to do this morning. We’re going to just look briefly at some introductory points. Then we’re going to encounter righteousness again. And we’re going to see why righteousness is so important to this sermon as we look at it this morning. We’re going to take a little bit of time just briefly. You’re not going to need an extra outline for this. We’ll just briefly look at the structure, how this particular section is built in The Sermon on the Mount.

You’ll notice by this point that Matthew—and it’s not just here in The Sermon on the Mount; it’s other places in the Gospel—that Matthew loves threes. He has a penchant for threes. He has a penchant for threes standing alone. He puts threes together like he did last week, two sets of threes. So we’re going to look at structure today. It’s going to be brief.

And then we’re going to look at the way of the hypocrite and the way of the righteous. We’re going to set those off against one another. And you’ll see why here when we look at the topic of righteousness again.

But before we do that, let me ask you a question, a very practical question this morning, because I think that this text demands us to think very practically. Hopefully, by the end of the time together, you’re going to be challenged a bit by what we think about today. What practices are among the most difficult in the Christian life? If you had to name some of the most difficult practices, which ones would you name? Let me ask you that. Which ones?

Participant: All of them.

Jeff: Okay, all right. *(Laughter)* All right! Moving right along. *(Laughter)*

Participant: Forgiveness.

Jeff: Okay. Forgiveness. And is it any wonder that at the end of the Lord’s Prayer that you find a reiteration of forgiveness? Go ahead.

Participant: Working out my salvation with fear and trembling.

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Jeff: Okay. Fear of the Lord. You know, oftentimes we don't have that sense that John Newton had, right? It's by grace that I was saved, but it was grace that taught my heart to fear. We don't have that sense. Yes?

Participant: Not the fear, but the working out part. That's the tough part. What does he actually mean by that?

Jeff: Yes. Well that's for another time. I think Bruce said that he was going to teach on Philippians when he gets back. So you can ask him that. *(Laughter)* Anything else?

Participant: A private time with the Lord.

Jeff: Okay, yes. A consistent, steady private time with the Lord, a quiet time. Yes?

Participant: Lusting after women!

Jeff: Okay. Lust is a big issue. We saw that last time, right? It's a challenge to our vows.

Participant: What comes out of your mouth and you wish it had not been said.

Jeff: Taming the tongue, absolutely. All of these, right?

Participant: Listening to others.

Jeff: Listening to others, yes. Heeding brotherly counsel.

Participant: The difference between enabling someone—I'm not sure how to say this—but the difference between keeping someone responsible and taking on their—

Jeff: Helping others with accountability and us being accountable as well, and us helping them to be accountable.

Participant: Right.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely, all of these things. Actually our brother said, “All of them,” and that sums it up. *(Laughter)* Jesus picks three. He gives us three, I think three of the very difficult ones. First of all, *giving our money away*. Giving our money away is a difficult one, and giving it away in an appropriate manner.

How about *praying in the closet*? Somebody said “a private time with the Lord.” That's our prayer time in the closet.

And how about *fasting from food*, perhaps the most difficult one of all? So three practices in the Christian life that are difficult.

I want to reflect on these just for a minute. Why is it that giving is so difficult? Well I want you to think about this. We are thinking about almsgiving here. But I'm going to think about it in terms of tithing, because today we don't typically have almsgiving. But what we do is that we give to our churches so that they can put it into the mercy fund—at least that's one avenue of it,—and then distribute it. So there's a sense in which I'm going to collapse almsgiving and tithing as we think about this.

But did you know this? Did you know that only 3 to 5 per cent of regular churchgoers regularly tithe? That's a very small percentage. 97 of these make giving their top priority, 97% of these 3 to 5%. Do you realize what that means? That means that most of the ministry is being carried out by a very small portion of people in the church. And 77% of those who regularly tithe give between 11 and 20%.

Participant: Is this for the United States?

Jeff: Yes, this is for the United States. And I thought I had the year of this research up there, but I don't. I think it's within the last five to eight years.

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Participant: In the culture we live in, do you think that a lot of the Christian’s money doesn’t go to the church, but goes to para-ministries?

Jeff: It could be. It could very well be. Yes, absolutely. And think about that. This is why—well no, I don’t really want to say it. I don’t want to get into a discussion about para-ministries. But really, that is a question open for discussion. I mean that our confidence in the church today has dropped. And we have more confidence in para-church ministries to be able to carry out the ministry. And when you look at the Scriptures, we all know that’s fundamentally wrong. I mean that the church is the primary instrument of God’s carrying out His blessing and His gospel into the world. And there are wonderful para-church ministries out there that I love and that I’ve supported. But I’ve always tried to make my support for those ministries above and beyond my support for the church. I think that if you’re going to support a church ministry, that’s the way you ought to do it.

But giving stuff. The question is what keeps non-tithing Christians from giving? I’m not necessarily asking you to answer that, but I am wanting to put it into your mind. I think there are some answers given. That study that same study, given about five to eight years ago, provides some answers. 38% said that they couldn’t afford it.

Participant: You can’t afford not to.

Jeff: Yes, I totally agree. 33% said they had too much debt. And 18% said that their spouses do not agree with their tithing. Those are some reasons why people don’t give.

Here’s what I want to suggest to you. We may be able to fall into those. But we may have other reasons if we’re not giving. And it’s like what our brother said. None of the reasons are good reasons.

How about prayer? I just want you to think about prayer a minute. What keeps us from prayer? What keeps us from consistent prayer lives? Our career. Schooling. House chores. Sports. I’m not just talking about taking the kids here and there. But how about the Steelers? Now the Penguins are all right. *(Laughter)*

Participant: Priorities.

Jeff: You’ve got to prioritize, right?

Participant: What about the Pirates?

Jeff: Yeah. What about ‘em? *(Laughter)* Do we have a team here? *(Laughter)*

Participant: They need prayer. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Ah come on, guys! Yes?

Participant: How about media?

Jeff: Absolutely. I didn’t put that up there. But man, social media, Facebook. How many people do you know who will say to you, “I just didn’t have time to do this.” But they had time to sit on Facebook. I mean, maybe that’s not the correct thing that people sit on. But social media forever. Yes?

Participant: You talk about giving and your priorities. It’s like sports. You spent \$100 or \$200 to go to a game, but you won’t give five dollars to a collection.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: So what’s your priority? You think more of sports than you do God Himself.

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Jeff: Absolutely. And it’s not just that. Think about the time that we’ll put into getting the stats in our heads so that we can converse with other men about those things. Not that these things are bad. But even good things can displace better things. And if we’re allowing something that we’re interested in to displace something that ought to be in our lives, then that’s a problem. Yes?

Participant: You know, we save time. But we have all the time in the world. It’s our attitude, and it’s our hearts. The Lord said that if your marriage has a dysfunction there, it will hinder your prayer life.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: So it’s also in our lives. What’s going on in our lives, the attitudes we have and the responses we have affect us intimately, because the things we’re mentioning are really not connected to us.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: Football is not connected to us, but—

Second Participant: For some of us.

First Participant: Well, it is. We’re Christian men. But what’s in our lives is sometimes intimately keeping us from prayer.

Jeff: That’s right. How about fasting? You know, I think that fasting is one of those forgotten Christian disciplines. And you know, people don’t fast because of health concerns. And I understand that. My wife doesn’t fast when we have a church fast. But she’ll fast from something else. I completely understand that some people can’t fast because of health concerns.

Some people don’t fast just because it’s inconvenient. Some people don’t fast because they’re unwilling to sacrifice. And you could name a host of other reasons why people don’t do that sort of thing.

Why are these practices important, though? That’s the question that we really need to ask ourselves. Why are these practices so important in the Christian life? It’s because of this. They’re important because of *righteousness*.

Now we’re going to think about righteousness again because we have to. And we have to because it’s crucial not only to this sermon, but it’s crucial to the way in which Matthew has constructed his Gospel. Jesus came to bring righteousness. He came to fulfill all righteousness. We realize at the outset of The Sermon on the Mount that we have no righteousness. Therefore His righteousness needed to be given to us in order to fill us and satisfy us. And so the righteousness that we possess before God is an alien righteousness.

We also realize all kinds of other things about righteousness. The same set of the Beatitudes has told us that the righteousness that we have been given that is alien to us, that’s Christ’s righteousness, is a righteousness for which we will be persecuted. So there are all kinds of things that we’re told about righteousness. And they’re very important.

But why are these important? Well, because I want you to think about it this way. I want you to think about the righteousness that we’ve been given in order to satisfy the law, the requirements of the law that we looked at the last time.

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Again, you remember that the Pharisees were pitted against Jesus’ disciples. The Pharisees always tried to make it appear that they were righteous. But Jesus is saying, “No, no, no, no, no! You will have righteousness if you fundamentally recognize that you are devoid of righteousness. It’s only then that I come and fill you with My righteousness.” That’s repentance, right?

So why are these things important? They’re important because they are our righteous response to the righteousness that we’ve been given. Now check this out. When you look at 5:20, Jesus says that *“unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

Again, just remember that what we said earlier is not that the Scribes and the Pharisees are being put on a pedestal and Jesus is saying, “Look! These guys are super righteous. And unless your righteousness surpasses theirs, you’re done.” No, that’s not what He’s saying. Remember, what He’s saying is that these guys untied the law, loosened the law to give the appearance of law keeping. And unless your righteousness surpasses that,—and how is it that your righteousness will surpass that?

Well, number one, by recognizing that righteousness is a high standard that you can’t meet. Only Christ was able to meet it. And having met it, what happens? Well, in 6:1 you practice righteousness. You recognize that as you have been compared to the Pharisees that you are not going to untie the righteous requirements of the law. When you fail to keep them, you’ll have forgiveness to rely on in Christ. However, because you are in Christ, you will practice righteousness.

And so what we have here is that we have in this particular section a practice of righteousness that emerges from the righteousness that we’ve been shown, okay? So beware of practicing your righteousness before them. *“Otherwise, you have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”*

So why is righteousness so important? Well it’s important because of the things we’ve been saying. We hunger and thirst for righteousness. Christ is the One who fulfills us. We remember that there’s the twofold grace of God, that being that we possess the forensic benefits. We’re forgiven in Christ. But because we’re forgiven we also know a grace that renovates our lives. In other words, I can’t stand back and say, “Well, I’ve been forgiven. I just need to wait for the second blessing.” No! No, no, no, no, no! In Jesus Christ you have been given forgiveness and holiness—sanctification, those renovative benefits. And so they’ll emerge from your life. You will practice righteousness.

And the law guides our righteousness. Remember what Jesus says. This is The Sermon on the Mount. *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” “And He said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and foremost commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.’”*

Now here’s when I just stop and pause, and say to you in terms of the structure of The Sermon on the Mount that we’ve divided The Sermon on the Mount up so that we’re looking at loving your neighbor, loving God, loving your neighbor. And isn’t it interesting that in this summation Jesus says that on these hang the Law and the Prophets.

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And let me just show you that. If you look in chapter 5 of The Sermon on the Mount, look at chapter 5 verse 17. This is right at the beginning of the body of The Sermon on the Mount when He says, *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets.”*

And then go to 7:12. As He brings the body of the sermon to a close, look at what He says. *“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”* Again, the point being that the body of the sermon, which consists of loving others, loving God, loving God, loving others, is enclosed, is bookended by the phrase *“the Law and the Prophets.”* Why Because these two great commandments hang on the Law and the Prophets. Go ahead, Sig.

Sig: I understand when Jesus says that *“on these two commandments depend the Law.”* But the phrase *“and the Prophets”* doesn't seem to fit. I don't see how those two fit. The Law I understand. Here's the law. This is how we should live. But what does the phrase *“and the Prophets—*

Jeff: The prophets prophesied about the One who would come to fulfill the law.

Sig: So that's what He's referring to?

Jeff: I think that's what's at the heart of this.

Sig: The prophecy of Himself?

Jeff: Yes. Think about Christ. Christ says that He is *“the Alpha and the Omega.”* In other words, He created the world from which the prophets could emerge to prophesy about Him, so that He could come and fulfill what they said about Him. You know, there's this idea that—

Sig: Would that have been clear to the people that He was speaking to? I didn't even get that. And we know more than they did.

Participant: No, we don't.

Second Participant: We should.

Sig: But it's all been fulfilled, right?

Jeff: Let me say this to you. Take 1 Peter, for instance. Let me read it to you. Go to 1 Peter chapter 1. And look at what he says in verse 10. *“Concerning this salvation the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what Person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.”*

So take, for instance, Isaiah, okay? Isaiah is writing and he's penning Isaiah 53. And his wife comes in and looks over his shoulder and says, *“What are you writing?” (Laughter)* And he says, *“You know, a word from the LORD.” (Laughter)*

And she says, *“Yes, but who are you writing about?”*

And he says, *“Well I know that I'm writing about the Messiah, the One who is going to come and fulfill these things. But I don't know when He's coming. And I don't know exactly who He is. There are things I know. But I've been searching my own writings and I've been searching other prophetic writings, trying to figure it out.”*

So there's a sense in which you can think about Christ emerging from prophecy in the same way that you see a person who is standing against a sunset emerging, right? There's the sun setting in the background. And you see this person walking toward you. But it's

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dark. You can't make him out. You can make out his shape and you can make out the way he walks. But you can't really see the features. But when he gets closer and closer, oh, yeah, yeah,. Yeah! I think that's the way you think about the prophecies concerning Christ.

But there was always an understanding because of Genesis 3:15 that One was going to come and crush the head of the serpent.

Transcriber's Note: Genesis 3:15. *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”*

Jeff: And His heel would be nipped in the process. So they always had this sense of One coming. But there's progressiveness to prophecy, right? And that has to fully emerge when Christ comes on the scene. Does that make sense?

Sig: It makes a lot of sense. I've never heard it explained that well.

Jeff: Okay. Any other questions? So you see the structure then, how we're looking at the sermon and how that sort of thing works. Alms, prayer and fasting are the practice of righteousness that we're looking at. So let's look for a minute at the structure.

The basic pattern of this particular triad is this. There's a *when* that starts out, and that's followed by instruction, followed by the phrase *“truly I say to you,”* which is followed by the phrase *“but you.”* That's the structure—*when* followed by instruction, followed by the phrase *“truly I say to you”* which is followed by the phrase *“but you.”* Let's look at that.

Verses 2-3. Here's our structure. *“When you give to the poor.”* There's the *when*, there's the instruction. *“When you give to the poor.”*

Here's the phrase. *“Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you.”* There's our structure.

Now in 5 and 6 here it is again. *“When you pray.”* There's the *when*, there's the instruction. *“Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you.”*

And then verses 16-17. The New American Standard has the word *whenever*, but it's the same Greek word as it was in 2 and 5. *“When you fast.”* And then there's the phrase *“truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you.”*

When is the word that sticks out because *when* is a word of expectation. In other words, when you look at these practices, one of the things that you come away with is that Jesus expects me to do these things. So I get when I give and when I pray. I think that the thing we are most lacking in in the church today is fasting—when I fast. But all three of these things are expected. All three of them are expected from us. I think that's crucial. But that's the structure. And I think that's in part what the structure communicates in the way that He frames it. Go ahead.

Participant: Yes, Jeff. When you asked the question why is it important?, for me it's realigning our priorities. God is very pragmatic. So in light of what you're saying about righteousness, God is saying, “Do it this way. If you're going to fast, here's what you've got to do,” because Christianity is a relationship. It's an experience. You can't experience it until you do it.

Jeff: Yes.

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Participant: You might know it all in your head. But until you actually give, or you actually fast, or you actually have a consistent prayer life and pray for people, you won't have that experience.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: If you want that experience of righteousness, you've got to have that desire to—

Jeff: Absolutely. You're 100% right. You know, salvation in Christ is not systematic theology. Salvation in Christ is a relationship with Jesus Christ. And He works all those, for instance, the knowledge aspect. He works that out in us as we go, right? And He works out the practices in us as we go. And as we practice our righteousness, it's the righteousness that comes out of the reservoir of His righteousness, right? Beautiful things begin to happen in our lives.

Okay. Let's look at the way of the hypocrite and the way of the righteous. And then we're going to look at some practical counsel in the way of the righteous.

Notice again the sin of the Scribes and the Pharisees. Some of this is just review, and I've already mentioned this. So if you've got it, I'm going to pass over it. But what was it? It was the loosening of the law. And what was their purpose? Again it was to give the appearance of having kept the law.

Now what's the difference between the hypocrite and the righteous? Well first of all we need to understand what a hypocrite is. A hypocrite is an actor, one who pretends.

Now this is one of those words that's borrowed by New Testament authors from the time in which they were living. And it wasn't a bad word. To be a hypocrite was to be an actor. And so there was a time in the history of the world when if somebody said, “You are a great hypocrite!”, you would go, “Oh, thank you very much!” (*Laughter*) Now, if somebody says, “You are a great hypocrite!”, you roll up your sleeves, right? That's not the way it was. It was to be an actor.

And so, for instance, what? When you had the plays, and they were switching to the faces and then this mask comes on. And the idea was that wow, you played those roles really well! I didn't know that was you when you were up there doing that particular role! Why? Because you weren't yourself. You were somebody different. And that's the idea of a hypocrite.

So there was a sense and a time when to be a hypocrite was to be good. But Jesus says, “No, no, no.” This is not a good thing when it comes to practicing your righteousness.

What is it to practice your righteousness as a hypocrite and to be in the scope of Jesus in terms of this bad practice? Well, it's to be the Pharisee. And what does the Pharisee do? The primary difference here is *public*. Public versus what? Public versus private.

And so when you want to loosen the law so as to give the appearance of law keeping, you don't do that in private. Why? Because you know you can't fool God. You do that in public to fool others. That's not the way of the righteous.

Now do you know that there are three different types of hypocrites? When you really think about it, think about it like this. There's *the person who feigns goodness, but is*

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actually evil and knows it. Do you know what I mean? This is the person who’s cold and calculating. This is the person who’s absolutely terrifying.

I don’t know if you’ve ever dealt with a person like this before. I’ll tell you what. I dealt with two people at just about the same time. I dealt with one guy who was a biker, a tough guy, a drug user. He didn’t scare me a bit. I dealt with another guy dressed in a suit and tie and he was this kind of hypocrite, and he scared me to death, right? This is the kind of guy who feigns goodness but is actually evil and he knows it.

Type 2. Sounds like diabetes. *(Laughter)* Type 1, type 2. *(Laughter)* Type 2 is the person who’s fooled by his own deceit. I want you to think about it. You could probably give other examples. But this is the person who, you know, this is the girl you knew in high school and you wanted to date you badly. And you told her, “No. I don’t really want to date. I’m really good right now.”

And she came back and she said, “No, no. Do you want to go out?”

And you said, “No, no, no. I’m really good.” And then you say, “Look, I don’t really think we’re compatible. I don’t really like you.”

And she goes home and she tells her mom, “I think he loves me.” *(Laughter)* They’re fooled. And they’ve fooled themselves.

And then there’s type 3. This is the person who deceives himself into thinking that *he’s acting in God’s best interests and also deceives his audience.* I think this kind of matches up very well with the Pharisees. They really do believe that they are acting in God’s best interests. And they actually deceive others into thinking that about themselves. If we could give the Pharisees the benefit of the doubt and put them in the best possible light, this would be it.

But I’ve got news for you. Even if we put them in the best possible light, this is still wrong. This is still hypocrisy, even though it’s of a different type.

The question is, are we deceiving by practicing righteousness in private? That’s the question. When you think about the flip side of it, are we deceiving by practicing righteousness in private?

I once knew a guy. This is the way he would put his tithe in the offering plate. When the plate would come around, he would turn his head as he would throw his money into the plate. And I confronted him one day and I said, “Jim, what are you doing?”

And he said, “I’m not supposed to let my left hand know what my right hand is doing.” *(Laughter)*

And I thought, “Jim what are you doing?” Apparently the one side of his body wouldn’t know what the other side of his body was doing at that time.

Participant: It’s called schizophrenia. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: The quick answer is no! We are to let our light shine before men. That’s what the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount told us. What’s the difference? Righteousness in secret is asking us this. Who’s approval are we seeking? That’s the main difference.

So it’s not that we are supposed to hide ourselves away and never let anyone know that we’re Christians by our practices. That’s not what’s being said. What’s being said is that this whole idea of *private* is that you’d better know who it is with whom you’re

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seeking to find approval. You want to be seeking God and His approval, and not that of others.

Well what about the way of righteousness? We’ve got to work through this. I would say that this is difficult. If anybody tells you that it’s not difficult, they’re living in a dream world. I want you to know that there’s an expectation involved in what we’re supposed to do. And I also want you to know that there’s a reward. The reward, though, is because God is a good Father, not because He owes us anything.

You know, your dad tells you to clean your room. You clean your room and he gives you an allowance for it. And you go, “What’s this for? Wasn’t I only doing my duty?”

And he goes, “You’re right. And I’m going to reward you for that. But I don’t have to.” That’s the idea.

And then I want you to know that this is not elitism. We could talk about The Sermon on the Mount in the different ways that The Sermon on the Mount has been interpreted throughout the years. And one of the ways in which the sermon has been interpreted is to say that there are those in the church who are elite, and they are the ones who are called to practice The Sermon on the Mount. But it’s not for regular Christians.

Participant: Baloney!

Jeff: Yes. Seriously. This is not elitism.

So let’s think about it. I want to take each one of these. I want to take *giving*. I want to take *prayer*. And I want to take *fasting*. And I want to give you some guidelines.

When we give, we need to give out of a full heart. That’s the teaching of 2 Corinthians 8. We’d best not keep a record of it. Just give it and let it go.

Participant: Does that mean that we don’t report it to the IRS?

Jeff: I knew that was coming! (*Laughter*) I knew it, I knew it, I knew it! (*Laughter*) I think that’s a great question. The people who would say, “Oh, of course you are supposed to do that” would say this. They would say “That’s the way in which the state has an opportunity to serve the church.” You like that? Does that satisfy you? (*Laughter*) I’m not kidding you. You need to give out of grace. Forget the ten per cent thing, okay? That’s a good guideline. Forget the ten per cent thing.

Do you know what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8? He says, “Hey guys, look! I want you to give out of your heart. And as you do that, I want you to remember Jesus, who left everything,” right?—“to save you.” And so give out of the principle of grace.

Now you’re like “Oh, man! Are you serious?” Give out of grace. Yes?

Participant: The widow’s mite. Christ said that she gave all.

Jeff: Absolutely.

Participant: And that whoever it was that he gave out of his riches.

Jeff: Yes. That’s not a figure. When people ask me, they say, “Well how do we know?”, I want to say, “It’s back on you, man, okay?”

How about *praying*? Pray to the Father. Pray! We need to be praying. We need to be a praying group. I mean, I’ll tell you what. I really think that the health and the vitality of the church rests on our praying. And if we’re not a praying people, we’re not going to experience the fruit and the benefit of those blessings that we have in God.

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We need to avoid superstition. You know what? When I was a kid,—and I still remember—when I was a kid, I would kneel down beside my bed and I would pray. I had a beagle and he always ran away. And so I’d pray, “Lord, please don’t let Rags run away! Please don’t let Rags run away! Please don’t let Rags run away!” And I would say it five times. And then I got to the point where I would say it ten times. I thought that if five was good, ten was better. Then I’d say it 15 times because I thought that if ten was good, 15 was better. And then I would say it 20 times. As this little kid, I’m saying these silent prayers. And I would hate prayer because I would have to say, “Please don’t let Rags run away” 50 times before I’d go to bed.

You know what? As a little kid, when I heard the gospel and the implications of the gospel, I was so relieved that God was an all-knowing God, and I only had to pray it once. In fact, my dad told me, “Son, you only have to pray it because God commands you to pray it. God already knows what you’re going to say before you say it.”

I was a little kid. That was like a load lifted from me. We need to avoid superstition in prayer.

We need to pray the pattern. Look, I don’t know how you pray. But praying the pattern of the Lord’s Prayer is great. Praying acts—adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication,—that’s great. I think those are helpful things to keep us in a consistent rhythm of prayer.

And then *remember relationships*. I think that’s what Jesus is saying here. I’m not going to summarize The Lord’s Prayer, but those are some of the things that we need to remember out of this passage.

Fasting. I need to remember for whom I long. That’s the whole point of fasting. When the bridegroom was with them they didn’t fast. When He leaves, they’ll fast. I think the idea of fasting is that I long for the One who is not with me. I mean surely He’s with me in spirit. But Jesus had a point in mind when He said, “When I go away, they’ll fast.” So we need to remember for who we long.

We need to remember that fasting is not about you. You know, that’s really difficult. I think in our day and age that we have all these books that say, “Fast and lose ten pounds,” right? And I think we need to be careful to remember that fasting is not about us. Fasting is about the One who is not with us right now. And we need to fast because we miss Him. We long for Him.

So, though fasting may have some health benefits, that cannot be in our minds as we engage in a fast, because we long for Christ.

And we need to *remember the goal*. The goal is not even my own spiritual experience. You know, people say, “I had such an intense spiritual high on the third day of my fast.” That’s not what this is about. Remember, fasting is not about you. It’s not about your spiritual experience.

That doesn’t mean that that spiritual experience should be null and void. It doesn’t mean that you ought to ignore it. But it means that you don’t fast to get it. You fast because you miss the One who is not with you at the present time, the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s all I have today. Yes, Jim?

Jim: We sometimes fast for a purpose as well. I mean—

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Jeff: Oh, sure! Yeah, yeah, yeah! But think about it like this. I was planting a congregation in Meadville. Get a load of this. The RP Church will give you six years of decreasing aid to plant a church, and then tell you that it takes ten years to plant a church. *(Laughter)* So in year four we were tanking. We were in the red. And I thought, “Whoa, this is bad!”, right? And so the session called a fast.

And this is just a side. We called a guy to come preach to us when we broke the fast. And notoriously the guy preached for an hour. We knew he’d preach for an hour. And I forgot how hungry I’d be. *(Laughter)* You know, you’re trying to keep your mind, right? I’m trying to focus, right? *(Laughter)* You know, on day 2 of the fast you’re hungry.

Anyway, here’s the great thing about it. That story ends with this. Two weeks later an anonymous person drops money into the offering plate that pulls us into the black. And it was one of those times where God said, “I’m going to answer immediately and in a dramatic way.”

And yet the fasting time that we called for was so that the church could focus on God, because we believed for instance that at the time we had a group of guys who were studying Latin. I was among them. But I quit the group because I realized that our priorities weren’t in the right spot. I encouraged them. “Let’s study Latin, and then let’s go out and evangelize.” They would study Latin, but they wouldn’t have time to evangelize.

So I quit the group and I started an evangelism group. Things weren’t clicking, you know? And so we called the prayer time and fast time so that people could get their hearts right before God, not so that we could get pulled out of the red. And so, yes. But any time you do anything like that, there may be other things that you need. But the things that you need are indicators that God is not the center of your personal life or the life of your church, or whatever. So yes, Jim, that’s a great point. Don?

Don: When we talk about prayer, Jeff, I personally find it helpful sometimes, particularly when I’m trying to adore God, to use the Psalms as an aid.

Jeff: Yes.

Don: Do you see anything wrong with that?

Jeff: No. I think that’s great. I think that’s a great way to pray. I think we can get into habits and ruts. I think that if you are going to use the acts acrostic in order to pray, I think it’s helpful to not allow yourself to give the same answer for why do I adore God? Every day.

When I get into drive times, I keep a journal and I go through acts. And I ask myself, “Why do I adore God?” every day. And then I write the answer down. And I don’t allow myself to say the same answer every day.

So if I have to go back and refresh my memory as to why I said that I adore God in previous days, I do. And that causes me to have to think about why it is that I love God. So I think all of these things are good.

And you have to use different techniques at different times. I hate to use the word *technique* for prayer. But sometimes you use things in your prayer life to keep you going and move you in the right direction. Yes?

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Participant: In terms of practicing Christian righteousness, would you like to comment on the passage in the middle. The Lord says to us that if we do not forgive others, the Lord will not forgive us.

Jeff: Yes. So I think what He’s saying there is what we said earlier about the difficulty of forgiveness. But I think that what He is pressing in upon us is not that this is a requirement for your own forgiveness. But if you have been forgiven, you will forgive others. And so it’s a grace that ought to flow from you because of the righteousness that flowed into you. So I think that it’s not Jesus saying, “If you don’t forgive, you won’t be saved.” I think what He’s saying is that if you’re unforgiving, you have to ask yourself whether you’ve received that alien righteousness to begin with. Would you add anything to that, Bishop?

Bishop Rodgers: No, I’m just puzzling about it.

Jeff: Okay.

Bishop Rodgers: It sounds on the surface that it’s kind of a good work.

Jeff: Yes, Yes.

Participant: Jeff?

Jeff: Yes?

Participant: If we are unforgiving and we’re seeking God’s forgiveness, I think that in that sense He withholds the sense of that, of His forgiveness.

Jeff: Oh, sure. A weakness of faith, that kind of thing.

Participant: Not that you’re going to lose your salvation. But it stands to reason that if I’m going to act unforgivingly towards somebody who wronged me, and I know that I’ve wronged God today, and I go and ask for forgiveness, I’m not going to have that sense of forgiveness until I learn that you know what? I need to act like the Lord does first.

Jeff: Yes, and I think you’re right. And I think that one of the reasons why you have those passages where Jesus says, like in the last set of passages, that if you know your brother has something against you, and there are other passages that talk about you having something against others. So the Lord gets you coming and going. And I think that the whole idea of forgiveness is really important for the Christian life because if we are to live lives of belief and repentance every day, Luther says that’s not access and entry. That’s practice. That’s everyday practice for the Christian. Then if we are repenting before the Lord and receiving His forgiveness, that ought to flow to others in our lives.

And that’s difficult. And I think that the reason why there are passages like these passages that we’ve already mentioned are because of that difficulty. Did you have a question?

Participant: Just wanted to make a comment. Perhaps the message is put in that way to shake us up.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: We need to be driven back to the fact that we do rest entirely on God’s grace.

Jeff: Yes, right.

Participant: It’s very easy for us to forget that as we go along.

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Jeff: Yes. You know, it’s interesting. That’s the second time, when you look at the structure of The Sermon on the Mount. You have the eight Beatitudes, and then the persecution one flows out of that. You know, by the way, the righteousness that you’ve received—oh yes, you’re going to be persecuted for having that righteousness. That falls out as the tag line. And in The Lord’s Prayer it’s the same way, right? Pray for the forgiveness of your debts and those who have debts against you. And by the way, again it’s just a reminder that these kinds of emphases shake us up. Yes?

How do we correlate against the parable of the wicked servant who was forgiven so much. But then he went out and demanded that of someone else. And when it was discovered, it ended up worse for him in the end.

Jeff: Yes. My theology is going to say that *“they went out from among us because they were never of us.”* So says John. *(Laughter)* That may be the easy way out. But I’m going to let that fall on John’s shoulders. *(Laughter)*

Participant: I agree.

Jeff: Right. I think that’s difficult to say about an individual. And the apostles said that about the people who went out from them. I think they said that because they were inspired. And sessions are obviously given the power to do that in excommunication. But I don’t think individuals should make the practice of saying that he left us because he was never of us. We don’t have that power to excommunicate personally. We may speculate about that.

But when you have the kind of instance like you have unfolded for us, there you have not only the beginning but the end, too. His end was worse than his beginning, and so we’re told that. And so we kind of have that idea as though this fits John’s words pretty well.

Participant: Well, if you just think about it, here’s a guy who was forgiven millions. And that other guy owes five bucks.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: If he can’t make that connection, he never really received the millions. He really didn’t.

Jeff: Yes, that’s exactly it.

Participant: He took it for granted.

Jeff: Yes. Absolutely.

Participant: So he was not.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: I think it fits.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: It’s another form of hypocrisy. If we say that we depend on God’s forgiveness, but we’re not forgiving others, before God it’s another form of hypocrisy, and it illustrates what Jesus said earlier.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely.

Participant: And yet we do that all the time.

Second Participant: That’s right.

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Jeff: Now this is the thing about the Christian life. The Christian life is really difficult. And anybody who tells you that it isn't I'd like to know what Christian life they're living, because the Christian life really gets you coming or going. And it drives you to the fact that you need the grace of God. I don't know about you, but you never come to a time in the Christian life where you say, "I'm all that and a big pile of butter, too," right? Bread and butter, get it? You love bread! Anyway, I digress. *(Laughter)* But you're always getting a big whopping kick in the pants if you're really thinking about what the Scriptures say to you. And you're just always driven back to the fact that I'm in need of grace, you know? Yes, Bill?

Bill: Why do you use the word *difficult* instead of *impossible*?

Jeff: I only use that because Christ made it possible, just difficult.

Participant: It's impossible on our own.

Jeff: It's impossible on our own. Bill?

Bill: If we're poor in spirit, we're bankrupt.

Jeff: But we have a righteousness, right? We've been filled.

Bill: It's not ours.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely.

Bill: It's not of ourselves.

Jeff: It's not of ourselves. But in the place of—I'm willing to concede and say that it's absolutely impossible.

Bill: There you go! *(Laughter)*

Participant: But difficult is okay. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: I'm giving it to Bill. *(Laughter)* Let me pray with you real quick and then we'll depart. Father, thank You so much for this day and for these men. And Lord, again, please bless Bruce and his upcoming surgery. We pray that it would be a success. And Lord, we pray that You will bless us and our families throughout the rest of the day. We ask it in Christ's name. Amen.

Men: Amen. *(Applause)*