

## The Church of the Servant King

Home Bible Study

### Survey of the Bible Series

*The Gospel of Matthew*

(Lesson SB-6B)

Matthew Chapter 6:16-34

### **Fasting to Be Seen Only by God (6:16-18)**

Under the Mosaic Law, fasting was commanded only on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29-31; 23:27-32; Num 29:7); but during the Exile in Babylonian captivity, regular fasts of remembrance were observed on a national basis (Zech 7:3-5; 8:19). Of course, an individual could fast at any time he so desired. There are numerous examples in both the Old and New Testament where this occurred.

- As an indication of humility before the Lord often in connection with the confession of sins (Neh 9:1-2; Ps 35:13; Isa 58:3, 5; Dan 9:2-20; 10:2-3; Jonah 3:5; Acts 9:9).
- In association with laying some special petition before the Lord (Exod 24:18; Judg 20:26; 2 Sam 1:12; 2 Chron 20:3; Ezra 8:21-23; Esth 4:16; Matt 4:1-2; Acts 13:1-3; 14:23).
- A Christian in the Church Age can fast if he so desires (1 Cor 9:24-27 cf. Phil 3:19; 1 Peter 4:3).

Even in the OT, prophets criticized the hypocritical and merely formal practice of fasting (Isa 58:3-7; Jer 14:12; Zech 7:5-6). In Jesus' day, the Pharisees fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12). Anna, a devout Jew, fasted often (Lu 2:37).

Jesus did not ban fasting, rather He provides some guidelines for the disciples to follow when they fasted. The religious crowd would go without washing and other normal hygiene, sprinkle ashes on their heads, and omit the normal use of oil (cf. 2 Sam 14:2; Dan 10:3). Jesus taught His disciples to avoid drawing attention to oneself in any way when fasting.

In the Pauline epistles, we find similar governing guidance for believers of the Church Age. See Colossians 2:20-23.

### **Loyalty to Kingdom Values (6:19-34)**

In this section of Scripture, we see four blocks of instruction from Jesus to His disciples in which He provides the disciples with different metaphors for loyalty to kingdom values. The instruction concerning loyalty to kingdom values is illustrated by 1) the treasure of one's heart (6:19-21); 2) the focus of one's attention or the momentum of one's life (6:22-23); 3) one's choice of masters in life (6:24); and 4) the object of one's trust (6:25-34). The religious leaders of Jesus' day believed that the Lord materially blessed those He loved, therefore material wealth and prosperity was an indication of spiritual approval. This attitude spawned a focus upon building up treasures on earth, a self-centered focus to life, spiritual blindness, slavery to the world, and worry based upon a lack of trust in the Lord.

The Jews failed to understand that a vibrant spiritual life was the basis for God's material blessings to Old Testament believers. They misunderstood the spiritual basis that was the foundation for material blessings of believers in their Hebrew Scriptures that we know as the Old Testament. Examples of the passages that they probably distorted in meaning would include Job 1:1-3, 8; 42:12-17; Prov 13:4.

Today, the correlation between material prosperity and one's spiritual life is not an emphasis in Scripture. God's concept of missions in the dispensations prior to the Church Age was primarily *centripetal* in nature, i.e. unbelievers were to be drawn to God based upon the manner in which God blessed His spiritual people. This principle is the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12:3 and is found as a theme throughout the Old Testament (Ex 9:15-16; 15:3, 7, 15; 32:1-14; 1 Ki 8:41-43; 10:1, 7-9, 24). In the Church Age, God's concept of missions is *centrifugal* in nature, i.e. unbelievers are evangelized as believers go throughout the world consistent with the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20; Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19-23; Acts 1:6-8).

### **Lay Up Treasures in Heaven (6:19-21)**

The Greek construction of verse 19 would be better translated “stop storing up treasures” instead of “do not store up.” This is important because it serves as an indication that the time for a decisive break had come with Jesus’ offer of the gospel of the kingdom. Also, Jesus is not indicating that wealth in itself is an evil (see Lu 14:12; John 4:21; 1 Peter 3:3-4). Rather, He is concerned about selfishness and misplaced values.

The point of Jesus’ instruction is that those things most highly treasured occupy one’s heart. In Jesus’ day, God desired that kingdom norms be the treasure of one’s heart (see 5:20, 38-42). Today, we have similar truth (Col 3:1-2) and the production of the fruit of the Spirit is that which God desires (Gal 5:22-26) in our lives.

### **The Focus of One’s Attention and Momentum in Life (6:22-23)**

In these two verses, Jesus is not focusing upon the physical eye and what one sees through the physical eye. Rather, Jesus is focusing upon one’s spiritual focus or perspicacity. The momentum and direction of one’s life provides the pivot point from which one can chart his course in any number of directions. Jesus’ point is that unless one has the correct spiritual focus, then to that extent one is spiritually blind. The eye to which Jesus refers is equivalent to the heart or mind of man. The heart set on God so as to hold to His laws was what God desired of the Jew (Psa 119:18, 148 cf. 119:36-37). In verse 23, the phrase “the light that is in you” refers to the vision that the eye with divided loyalties provides, i.e. the attitude characterized by self-centeredness results in spiritual darkness and confusion regarding spiritual realities. The same principle is found in Church Age epistles (Eph 4:17-24; 5:8-14).

### **Slavery: Two Choices (6:24)**

In this verse, Jesus explains that behind the choice between two treasures (that which is valued and prioritized) and two visions (where the eyes are fixed and the course set in life) there is another basic choice regarding who or what to serve. The Greek word mammon is really a transliteration of an Aramaic word that meant wealth or property. The root in both Aramaic and Hebrew indicated that in which one had confidence. Paul acknowledge this principle in the Church Age when he states that he is a bondservant of Christ (Gal 3:10). See also Romans 6:22 and 1 Corinthians 7:23.

### **The Result: In What Do You Trust (6:25-34)**

In context, Jesus is making the point that the Jews did not need to focus their entire existence upon the physical necessities (let alone the luxuries implied) of life. He is not trying to promote a neglectful attitude toward one’s responsibilities and promote carelessness, apathy, or laziness in life. This is the principle that He states in verse 25. He then follows the general rule with specific examples in verses 26 – 30.

In verses 26-27, Jesus uses the example of the birds of the air to teach about the Lord’s provision of life and food. In verses 28-30, Jesus uses the example of the lilies of the field to teach about God’s provision for the body with clothes. He then summarizes the principle from the two examples in verses 31-32. The principle was that the root of anxiety is unbelief. Similar teaching is given to the Church Age believer in Philippians 4:6.

In verses 33-34, Jesus gets to the heart of the matter. The disciples (and Jewish and Gentile believers) who desired to enter the Kingdom needed to seek His Kingdom and His righteousness first.

### **An Illustration From Contemporary History**

In recent times, a radical theology has arisen that is more focused upon the worldly condition of man than it is focused upon his spiritual and eternal status. In fact, it is not that it is so new. Rather, it is just one of Satan’s many adaptations to different cultures with a form of religion that denies the power of

God (2 Tim 3:5). This theology is known as liberation theology and has arisen in an attempt to address the horrible situation in which the masses of Latin America find themselves. It is humanistic and ignores the spiritual view of the situation from the view of an omnipotent, omniscient, and a sovereign God. It is focused on the horizontal plane almost exclusively and the divinity developed in liberation theology is the divinity to be found in all mankind. Through social revolution, peaceful or violent, man is to attack injustice, establish a new society, and become a new man.

- Origins – It began with some of the youth movements of the '40's and '50's and was formalized by Richard Schull, a missionary in 1955. The liberation motif appeared with increasing frequency in a number of progressive Roman Catholic councils and ecumenical conferences in the '60's. It gained widespread recognition and acceptance at the second Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM II) in Medell'n, Columbia in 1968. [Consider the state of affairs in Columbia today].
- LT seeks to solve the problems of social injustice, inequality, insecurity, and iniquity through social revolution, peaceful or violent.
- LT is deeply indebted to Marxism for much of the theory embedded in its approach. (Poverty is a result of a class society, they believe, and people are poor because others are rich. Capitalism is the culprit).
- Biblical exegesis is seen as an exegesis of the dominant class.
- There is a strong element of utopianism. It is amillennial in orientation and desires to establish the kingdom of God on earth apart from divine intervention.
- The focus is on social sin rather than personal sin.

The bottom line is that LT is just one of many manifestations throughout history of Satan's deception of man through religion and its shift in focus away from the spiritual life found in Christ and toward the temporal problems in the world solved through human good and lifting man to divine status apart from the work of Christ (see Gen 3:4).