

Dr. David Turner, Matthew

Lecture 4A – Matthew 6-7: Prayer, Worries, and Other Matters

Hello, this is David Turner. Welcome to our Matthew lecture 4A. Our work is cut out for us here today in this lecture because we want to hit some high points in Matthew 6 and 7. So without further ado, we'd better get at it.

As we look at Matthew 6 and 7, notice on your supplemental material outline, page 17, we have divided it into about five sections there. And we'll try to hit some high points with each of those sections. First of all, Jesus on counterfeit and genuine religion in Matthew 6:1-18.

Notice on page 18, we have laid out there the way the passage handles structurally, where Jesus presents his teaching on three religious duties which would be basic for Matthew's Christian Jewish community. The general principles enunciated in 6:1, then in 6:2-4, the matter of alms or giving to the poor, 6:5-15, the matter of prayer, and then 6:16-18, the matter of fasting, are related. Each time one of these is treated, a similar pattern emerges.

Notice on page 18, Jesus first prohibits hypocritical religion and its ostentatious activity with the wrong motivation to be admired by others, and his solemn affirmation that they have their reward, contrasted with genuine religion, which is commanded. The activity should be carried out in secret to be seen only by the father, who will, in due time, reward the believer. So, the analysis of the passage is very interesting, and the structure is quite repetitive as Jesus first enunciates this general principle and then deals with three key areas of religious activity.

It is interesting to note that what Jesus is doing here, again, continues to elucidate what is meant when the disciples are told in 5:48 that they are to emulate the righteous character of their father and to emulate what is that greater righteousness, greater than that of the Jewish leaders in 5:20. The general principle enunciated in 6:1 connects righteousness with the disciples' intention. The disciples have to watch out for religious acts done with the intention to impress people, since acts done with the intention of impressing people will not be rewarded by the heavenly father. And now the matter of religious performance and its proper audience.

The disciple of Jesus strives to be perfect as the heavenly father is perfect. This means that holiness comes from the inside out. The disciple's character is to be modeled on the father's character, and the disciple's performance is to be done for the father's approval.

This certainly cuts against the grain of Western culture, which is often characterized by exhibitionism and ostentation. The world slogan is, if you've got it, flaunt it. And it's infiltrated the church as surely as it had the synagogues of Jesus' day.

But Jesus would not simply have his disciples do the right thing. He would also have them do it in the right way. When it comes to giving, we may not blow trumpets today, but we often publicize the names of the people who give the most.

Surely this violates the central principle of this passage, and it forgets the lesson of the widow's mite in Mark 12:41-44. In the matter of praying, eloquence and length are often confused with effectiveness. This makes it seem like God is ignorant of our needs and he's reluctant to meet them.

As far as fasting goes, the tendency we have is to ignore it altogether, but similar religious endeavors, which we think are above and beyond the call of duty, are often given a lot of publicity. In all three areas mentioned in Matthew 6:1-18, we're reminded that to gain the fleeting applause of today's crowd is to forfeit the approval of our Heavenly Father tomorrow and forever. The lesson that must be learned is that disciples are content to be noticed by the Father, realizing that the crowd's approval doesn't matter in the light of eternity.

Giving to the needy in order to receive publicity is not giving at all. It amounts to paying for human approval, and it forfeits divine approval. See Plummer, the old commentator, published in 1915, page 91.

Now we ought to spend a great deal of time with the Lord's Prayer here, and we can't spend as much as we should, but we will give it a shot. The Model for Prayer
The Lord's Prayer is in fact the model prayer for his disciples. It provides for them not a mantra to be mindlessly and superstitiously repeated, but an example of godly kingdom priorities in prayer.

It's helpful to think of 6:9 and 10 as indicating the person to whom prayer is addressed, the Heavenly Father, and the priorities by which prayers are formed, his glory. Concerning the person to whom prayer is addressed, he is characterized as Father. One's relationship to one's human father inevitably colors one's view of the Heavenly Father.

In this day of awareness of dysfunctional families, it can be helpful to acknowledge that one's relationship to one's human father may help or hinder one's perception of God as Heavenly Father. God is also our Father, and he is in heaven. He's our Father because he's come near to us by his grace, and he is our Father in heaven because he remains distant from his children due to his unapproachable glory.

The fact that he is our Father leads us to intimacy and community. He's not someone else's father, he's ours. And he's not my father in individualistic isolation from others who know him.

He belongs to all the disciples. The fact that he is in heaven leads his disciples to approach him with awe and reverence. God deserves the utmost respect as the one who perfectly blends goodness and greatness, grace and power, imminence and transcendence.

When prayer is made, one's view of God must balance his goodness and his greatness to avoid a one-sided syrupy sentimentality on the one hand and an austere apathy on the other. Concerning the priorities by which prayers are formed, 6:9, and 10, one must keep foremost in one's mind that one's motive should not be to receive goods and services from God but to render service to God. Prayer is not primarily to vindicate our causes, to meet our needs, to fulfill our desires, or to solve our problems.

We must not rush into God's presence with our spiritual grocery list and demand instant gratification. Rather, our priorities are to be the promotion of God's name or his reputation, the advancement of his kingdom or his rule, and the performance of his will. These three petitions are essentially one petition.

Each one is qualified by the burning desire that we ought to have to see the Father honored on earth as he is already honored in heaven. As one partners with God's purposes, one begins already to realize those priorities. But one also increasingly longs for the day when God's priorities are fully realized on earth.

The kingdom of God encroaches on Satan's domain whenever people come to faith in Jesus Christ. The kingdom also comes when Jesus' disciples grow in their relationships to God and to neighbor. The kingdom is not merely a future, and the disciples' hope is not escapism.

They do not look to leave the earth for an ethereal heavenly existence. Rather, they look for a concrete existence in which heaven comes to earth, as they seek heaven's interests on earth today. It's helpful to think of Matthew 6:11-15 as it concerns the problems about which the disciples pray in 6:11-13 and the principle that governs their prayers in 6:14-15. They pray for problems relating to daily provisions, pardon, and protection in 11:13.

As they pray, they remind themselves that unless God had forgiven them, they wouldn't be praying at all. And they respond to God by forgiving others, 6:14-15. When disciples pray for provisions, they pray for daily bread, which represents the necessities rather than the luxuries of life. In biblical times, workers were paid on a daily basis.

See chapter 20, verse 8. When one prays for daily bread, one asks God for immediate necessities. In Matthew 6:25, disciples are told not to worry about such necessities, and in 6:34, they're told not even to worry about tomorrow. Rather, they are to trust their Father implicitly for everything.

When disciples pray for pardon, they recognize that by God's grace, they are now better than they were, but they're not as good as they ought to be. Disciples are not yet perfect, and they have to realize that their attitudes and activities fall short of kingdom standards. As they admit spiritual poverty and hunger and thirst for righteousness, Matthew 5:3, and 6, they pray for God to forgive their ethical lapses from His law.

Receiving his pardon is an unspeakable privilege, but it comes with a corresponding responsibility, extending pardon to others. A forgiven person is a forgiving person. When disciples pray for protection from temptation to sin, they pray for God to break the cycle that so often plagues them.

Disciples are tempted by the world, the flesh, and the devil. Temptation leads to sin, and sin leads to the necessity of praying for forgiveness. The cycle goes on and on and on.

That's why they pray for protection from temptation and deliverance from the strategies of the evil one. Compare Jesus' strategy in Matthew 4:1-11. As disciples pray about their problems, their petitions are governed by a principle.

Just as petitions for the Father's glory are based on the principle on earth as it is in heaven, so their petitions for their own needs are based on the principle, as we have forgiven our debtors, 6:12, 6:14, and 6:15. Disciples may not presume to ask God to forgive them if they have not forgiven others. Reconciliation with God will not happen apart from reconciliation with neighbors, as we were taught in 5:23, and 24.

One has no right to pray for divine reconciliation if one hasn't practiced human reconciliation. It's not that we merit God's forgiveness by forgiving others, but that we demonstrate God has forgiven us when we forgive others. Compare the parable in 18:21-35.

I'd like to talk today about the prayer of Jabez and Brother Wilkinson's book. For myself, whatever the value of that book, I'll stick with this model prayer that Jesus has left us. We have to reflect upon how our prayers today stack up with our Lord's model prayer.

If we do that, the prayer of Jabez will take care of itself. Now we move on to chapter 6, verses 19 and 34, and the way we relate to material possessions. By way of

analysis, in this passage, there is an interweaving of commands against anxiety and materialism with commands to believe that God will meet our needs.

Some divide the passage into two units, the first on materialism, 6:19-24, and the second on anxiety, 6:25-34. The most difficult part of the passage is 6:22-23, which is not only hard to understand in itself, but also hard to relate to the context. Overall, Matthew 6:19-34 is not structured as clearly as preceding parts of the sermon. But we can figure out its basic structure if we notice how it keeps recycling three things.

First, prohibition of materialistic activities and anxious thoughts, such as in 6:19, 25, 31, and 34a. Second, exhortations to join us in having kingdom priorities in how we act and how we think, 6:20 and 33. Finally, motivations, statements, proverbs, rhetorical questions, which move us toward obedience, verses 21-24, 26-30, 32, and the last part of verse 34.

6:19-34 is closely tied to the human needs portion of the disciples' prayer, especially its request for daily bread. Therefore, it relates very clearly to what we have seen before. Now, these three types of statements that I've mentioned, prohibitions, exhortations, and motivations, are woven together in a repetitive way that reinforces Jesus' teaching.

Instead of materialistic pursuits, we are to pursue kingdom priorities due to the futility of worry and the assurance of the Father's care. To just briefly expound some of the main ideas in this passage, In Matthew 6, Jesus addresses two matters, religious hypocrisy in 1-18 and anxious materialism in 19-34. The first part of the chapter enjoins the proper practice of religious duties, and the second stresses the proper priority in meeting one's worldly needs.

Both parts of the chapter call on us to put God first. Davies and Allison, in their commentary, remind us that, having prayed the prayer of Jesus, how could we remain anxious? We're taught in 6:1-18 to live for the Father's reward, not the crowd's applause. Our prayers are first to express zeal for God's glory, and only second to express concern for our own needs.

Then we're taught in 19-34 that our Heavenly Father's care is much greater than His care for birds and flowers. Ironically, if we seek the Father's kingdom first, our needs will be met. We'll receive what we didn't seek.

But if we seek first to meet our own needs, they will be no different than the pagans who don't have a God who knows what they need. Our Father expects us as His children to put Him first, but He delights to meet our needs. Disciples must not permit their needs to dominate their prayers, their thoughts, and their activities.

That's immaturity. But on the other hand, disciples must not think that God doesn't care about their needs. That's unbelievable.

Disciples must prioritize their allegiance to God, His rule, and His righteous standards. In so doing, they will receive all they need to eat and to wear, as it were, as fringe benefits. But if they insist on prioritizing their own needs in their prayers and activities, they'll never experience the joy of resting in the Father's care and in His provision.

The hymn writer, Carolina Berg, put it this way, Children of the Heavenly Father, safely to His bosom gather. Nestling bird, nor star in heaven, never such a refuge was given. We'll have to conclude our thinking on 6:19-34 with those words.

Much more needs to be said, but that's all we have time for. Now we move on to the initial section in 7:1-6, which is a difficult passage to follow. It seems that judgmentalism, that is to say, being a censor constantly of other people, is the subject in 7:1-5. Keener, in his commentary published in 1999, page 240, aptly points out that this prohibition of judgmentalism is related to the previous command to be forgiving to other people in 6:12-15. Jesus' teaching on how to deal with people in 7:1-6 presents two opposite extremes.

First, there is a warning against judgmentalism in 7:1-5, which may be analyzed as an initial prohibition in 7:1, supported by a theological motivation in 7.2, and a humorous hyperbolic illustration in 7:3-5. Then there is a brief warning against the opposite of judgmentalism, which is gullibility. 7:6, this warning takes the literary form of a chiasmus or introverted parallelism, that is to say, it is the pigs who will trample the pearls, and it is the dogs who will turn and attack you. Now, the point of the passage is hypocritical judgmentalism versus genuine discernment.

Matthew 7:1 has the dubious distinction of being one of the most misquoted verses in the New Testament. Postmodernism now supplies a sophisticated philosophical basis for those who all along stressed relativism and subjectivity, and denied that there were moral absolutes on which one could make absolute statements about right and wrong, good and evil. Matthew 7:1 is the favorite verse of such folk.

But depending upon the context, the words judge and judgment can connote either analysis and evaluation, or condemnation and punishment. Discipleship inevitably requires discerning judgments about individuals and their teachings. Many passages would indicate that.

3:7, 5:20, 6:24, 7:6, 10:13, and following, 13:51. Jesus himself makes these judgments many times. 4:10, 6:2 and 5, 7:21 to 23, 8:10 to 12, 13:10 to 13, and 15:14. Therefore, Jesus does not forbid here what he permits elsewhere. He even exemplifies it elsewhere.

What does he forbid? Well, he forbids a rigid, censorious judgmentalism which scrutinizes others without even a glance at oneself. Such a rigorous standard will return to haunt the one who condemns others by it. King David learned this lesson the hard way in 2 Samuel 12:1-15. Jesus teaches that genuine, honest introspection is an indispensable prerequisite for clear discernment and just moral judgments.

Such judgments will be ultimately constructive, not retributive, since Jesus' disciples will not demand an eye for an eye and will love their enemies. 5:33-48 Jesus' disciples should neither be censorious inquisitors, 7:1-5, nor naive simpletons, 7:6. Those who viciously reject and continue to scorn the gospel must be regarded as dangerous enemies of the kingdom whose evil actions can do great damage. Jesus exemplifies this in this gospel.

Disciples have to be wary of such people. But unless we've removed the log from our own eye, as it were, we won't be able to discern the difference between a fellow believer with a relatively minor problem and an enemy who will do great harm to the kingdom. Therefore, we have to do genuine introspection, because if we don't, we may blunder on the side of judgmental hypocrisy or naive gullibility.

If we're ignorant of ourselves, we'll often be arrogant toward others, and disaster will result. Careful readers of this passage will note that the gracious, positive tone of 7:7-11 provides a welcome change from the many prohibitions which have preceded it. Commands lead to reassurance.

Kingdom standards are high, but disciples should not be encouraged or anxious in pursuing them. God is infinitely better than the best of human parents, and He promises to supply the needs of His family. A similar argument with feminine imagery is found in Isaiah 49.15. Going now to Matthew 7:7-12, these verses are in the form of an inclusio, with Your Father will give to those who ask in 7:11, answering to ask and it shall be given to you in 7:7. Hagner is correct that on the surface 7:7-11 is about prayer and has no obvious connection to the preceding or following contexts.

However, other scholars attempt to find a connection in the common theme of how to treat people. If this is the case, the passage teaches that one must treat people with discernment, not judgmentally or gullibly, but with the same generosity exhibited by our Heavenly Father in answering prayers. This may be helpful, but it's not as clear as we would like it, and it is difficult to relate 7:7-11 to the preceding context.

Well, what does Jesus say about prayer? Let's briefly expound 7:7-11. 7:7-11 may be regarded as a sort of postscript to the model prayer of 6:9-13. That prayer builds on the truth that religious duties are being performed for God's eyes alone, 6:4, 6, and

18. God sees what is done in private, and He will reward His disciples. Additionally, Jesus has assured the disciples that their Heavenly Father knows what they need even before they can ask Him about it in 6:8 and 6:32. So it's already been taught that God is aware of His disciples and their needs.

Accordingly, 7:7-11 goes even further by stressing that God knows His disciples' needs will certainly answer their prayers from the depths of His goodness, 7:11. In the midst of their trials, disciples of the kingdom are often tempted to think that God is unaware of their problems and their needs. This is altogether understandable, but it's absolutely mistaken, and it's put to rest by 6:8 and 6:32. Your Heavenly Father knows. Yet even when we are assured that God knows our needs, sometimes we still wonder whether God is able to answer our prayers.

But 7:7-8 make it abundantly clear that the answer is certain to come. We will receive. And even when disciples believe that God knows and will answer, they may doubt that the answer will be good, but they're comforted by the affirmation of God's benevolence in 7:9-11. Your Heavenly Father will give good gifts.

God is not ignorant, and neither is He impotent. He's not malevolent. He's not an evildoer.

These truths have to be learned and relearned daily in the crucible of Christian experience. We all have a lot of work to go in that respect. Finally, the last part of Matthew 7, where we have the three warnings.

Matthew 7:13-27, the conclusion to the sermon, can be divided into four paragraphs, 13-14, 15-20, 21-23, and 24-27. But the judgment seen in 21-23 is clearly tied to the parabolic language of 7:15-20. Therefore, 7:15-20, the actions of the false prophets, is linked in 7:21-23 to the words of the false prophets, and there are only three sections in 7:13-27. These verses constitute a stern warning which presents two contrasting responses to the sermon in the form of three metaphors. The contrasting responses are likened unto taking one of two gates, to the fruit of one of two trees, and to building one of two houses on different foundations.

We have given you a chart on page 19, which attempts to lay out the ethical dualism of this material. That is to say, it's a strong statement that one either obeys or disobeys God and Jesus. And it lays it out for you there, hopefully in a way that will be helpful to teach us that there is no middle ground.

That's the point. No middle ground. There's no middle ground because there are only two ways.

It's difficult to know how to imagine the gates or roads of 7:13 and 14. Some take it that one travels the road and then comes to the gate, but this reverses the order of

the terms as they occur in the text. Although it's not necessary to answer this question to get the picture, it's helpful to picture a wall with a narrow gate and a wide gate.

One can easily enter the wide gate, and once inside, the path of antinomianism is smooth, but suddenly, as if a bridge had collapsed without warning, one arrives in hell. The wide path that seemed to promise freedom has ended in destruction, separation from God. On the other hand, when one takes the difficult step of entering the narrow gate, the path of discipleship can be very arduous, but suddenly one is ushered into eternal life.

The rugged path that threatened to destroy has ended in freedom, sharing in the life of God. These two gates and roads vividly indicate that those who do not turn from sin to God take an easy road, but it leads to the most difficult destination imaginable. But those who take the difficult way of the kingdom arrive at the best possible destination, where they experience the ultimate in the life of the Father.

Two trees. Jesus' plain words in 7:15-23, which clearly distinguish between two kinds of fruit and two kinds of trees, seem to be regularly blurred in some circles. At times, evangelical Christians tend to exchange Jesus' stark soteriological dualism for the cheap grace thinking, which says that many who luxuriate on the broad path will somehow after all end up in the kingdom with those who made the rigorous trek of discipleship.

That there should be anything controversial about Christ's lordship and salvation is amazing when you consider 7:15 and following. Elsewhere in Matthew, the metaphor of fruit is commonly used to show that only an upright lifestyle is compatible with discipleship. Get your concordance and find fruit in Matthew, and you'll see.

Matthew would agree with James 2:26 that faith without works is dead. While this teaching must not be made even more rigorous by legalistic and perfectionistic additions, neither must it be diluted by antinomianism. Even Paul, to whom antinomians regularly appear, frequently stressed the necessity, not the option, of perseverance in good works in such passages as Romans 2:13, 3:8, 8:25, 11:22, 13:14, Galatians 5:6, Ephesians 2:10 and 4:17, Colossians 1:23, Titus 2:7 and following.

But the focus of the good and bad trees in Matthew 7:15-23 is on false prophets, who are likened not only to bad trees which produce worthless fruit, but also to wolves which masquerade as sheep. This disguise is extremely deceptive. The wolves are even able to perform the sheep-like activities of prophecy, exorcism, and miracles, and they do not hesitate to mouth the lordship of Jesus.

The situation is grim, but there is a solution. These wolves masquerading as sheep can be unmasked when their works, pictured as fruit, are inspected by the standards of the sermon. If their ethical activities are incompatible with the values of the kingdom expounded here, they are to be identified and exposed as false prophets.

Their spectacular charismatic achievements aside, compare Matthew 24:23-28 and Deuteronomy 13:1-5, their ministries will only detour would-be disciples from the repentant road to life onto the antinomian highway to hell. We'd better beware those types of false prophets. It would be wrong to conclude from this warning against antinomian prophets that Matthew takes a consistently dim view of prophets and charismatic activities, however.

That doesn't really fit, and there are positive things said about prophets elsewhere. The final illustration, the third warning, contrasts two builders or two foundations. The picture of discipleship as building a house in Matthew 7:24-27 is very effective, and it's found elsewhere in scripture, as in Deuteronomy 28:15-30, Proverbs 10:25, especially Ezekiel 13:8 and following.

This metaphor also rings true today since one regularly hears of housing problems caused by shoddy craftsmanship and inferior materials, which come to light during times of extreme weather. But what is the difference between a wise builder who constructs a solid house and a foolish cobbler who throws up a shoddy house? In Jesus' metaphor, the difference is the obedient deeds of wise disciples who act on what they hear from their master, contrasted with the inactivity of the complacent hearers who do nothing. The former build an enduring house on the rock, the latter a doomed edifice on sand.

Now for the third time the clear warning has been given. Neither the ancient crowds who originally heard the sermon from Jesus on the mount, nor the modern readers who encounter the gist of it today in Matthew 5-7 can dare to walk away unchanged, complacent. To do so is ultimately not to weather the storm, to be eternally separated from Jesus, to arrive in hell.

So, let's heed these warnings, let's weather the storm, let's enter the kingdom and find life. We've been warned. We'd better marvel at these words just like the original hearers did in 7:28 and 29.

This is the authoritative word of the living God from his Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ.