

## “Back to School with Jesus: Remember the Basics”

Scripture: Matthew 6:1-18

Graphics: back to school, paper, books, backpack

Big Truth: The Sermon on the Mount is essential teaching for the Christian life and the promise of blessing that comes through poverty of spirit and mourning which are the key foundation of the sermon. It's great to learn the words of Jesus and even be able to recite them, as we share the good news. However, Jesus calls us to not only know the words and The Word, but to put those words into practice as we love and serve the world in Jesus' name. Let's go back to school with Jesus. Whether you are young or old, there is always something to learn so that you can put it into practice.

Focus Phrase: The practice of humble piety to God gives us an audience of One who loves to reward us.

### 1. Introduction

- A. **PRAY! (Jesus, You are Lord...)**
- B. So far, in this **Back to School with Jesus** series, Jesus said the class: ***It's Going to be Great!*** and ***You be Different!***
- C. On a mountain side in the middle of the country surrounding Galilee, Jesus gave this most famous sermon ever in the history of the world. In it, he began to give a clear picture of the future reality for those who trust in and put their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord.
- D. Today, Jesus will begin his first full lessons by going **back to the basics**.
- E. In every aspect of life, it's important to always go back to the basics.
  - i. In math, those basics are adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing (at least, I think we still teach those, right?).
  - ii. In football, the basics are tackling, footwork, and stance.
  - iii. In language arts, it's grammar, sentence structure, and reading.
  - iv. In fishing, the basics are casting, how to tie the line, when to set the hook.
- F. Take ANY aspect of life or work or hobby, and there are certain set of things that are SO important to the success of that activity that if you forgot about those things, you can NOT be as successful. They're like the foundation of a building...without a foundation, the building cannot stand for long.
- G. It's certainly no different when we're becoming Kingdom people, following after Jesus as Lord and Savior.
- H. That's why Jesus preached this Sermon on the Mount. He wanted his followers to be really good at being Kingdom people. He knew they needed encouragement to get started, and to see the distinctiveness of their call to holiness.

- I. Church, we are called to holiness and mission today because of the glorious riches that are coming. Yet, are we seeking rewards in THIS life - human rewards - or will we live our lives to seek rewards from God alone, when Jesus returns?
- J. That's the question that Jesus implies in his lesson today.
- K. But he doesn't just let the disciples hang out there to answer that question. He gave them - and gives US - this reminder: "Remember the basics...of giving, prayer, and fasting." These three basics were not new to the people listening... they all were well aware of the Jewish Temple Service, which included almsgiving to the poor, corporate and private prayer, and regular fasting.
- L. The problem was, some of them had forgotten those basics. Or turned them into something about themselves and not God. Jesus was not only calling them back to the basics, but to practice those disciplines in a brand new way because of Him.
- M. I think we all need to get back to the basics...so let's open our bibles to Matthew 6, starting in verse 1. Today, we'll look at the first verse, and then take this in three sections and then come back to tie it all together.
- N. Verse 1 to begin...

## 2. Scripture

### A. READ MATTHEW 6:1

- i. Getting pop at a restaurant growing up was a big treat for my brother and me. But there was always a period of time when you have that Pepsi sitting in front of you before the food came. I'm the type of guy who would take a sip or two, but save the rest for my meal. My brother, on the other hand, would suck his drink down. My parents would always predictably say, "If you drink it all now, you won't have any left for your meal." Instant gratification always won out for my brother.
- ii. Jesus' opening statement to the disciples was similar, "If you crave and get all the praise from humans now by doing things that will get that praise, then you won't have a reward from your Father in heaven."
- iii. In some ways, this is a pride issue...meaning that if you want everyone else to know what you're doing, so they can praise you, then it's really all about you. Social media has some good qualities, but it was created solely so that people can get praise from other people by letting everyone know what you've been up to. Harmless, most of the time, but there are cautions there.
- iv. Now, Jesus wasn't addressing social media or what you had for lunch. His topic is WAY more eternally-impactful. His topic for this lesson is **piety**... and more specifically the disciples **PRACTICE of PIETY**.

- v. Before we dive into the basics of practices of piety, we need to know what piety is. [dictionary.com](http://dictionary.com) tells us that piety is *reverence for God or devout fulfillment of religious obligations*. Cambridge dictionary is a little more helpful: *strong belief in a religion that is shown in the way someone lives*.
- vi. John Wesley believed that an act of piety is anything that showed your true devotion to God - worship, prayer, receiving communion, etc.
- vii. When Jesus talked about the practice of piety, he was talking about anything that was done primarily for a person's devotion to God. Practices of piety certainly have benefits to the pious person, but primarily, those acts are focused on God alone...and not humans.
- viii. So, the caution Jesus gave was, "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them..." Be careful - be aware - of your motivation to practice your devotion to God in public. If you are doing what you do IN ORDER FOR others to SEE and say, "Wow, that person is really devoted to God!" that, according to Jesus, is the wrong motivation.
- ix. That doesn't mean we shouldn't practice piety in public with others. That doesn't mean we shouldn't be expressive in worship or prayer. We SHOULD! God loves it when we are passionate and expressive in worship and prayer together. However, don't let your MOTIVATION be that others will see you and think you're awesome because of the expression.
- x. The simple truth is that God sees your heart anyway...and knows your motivations...and wants to honor and reward you for simply loving Him.
- xi. One prayer to pray is from **Psalm 139:23-24: Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.**
- xii. Don't drink all your pop first, so you won't have any when the food comes. The meal to come is where the good stuff is - the GOD STUFF.
- xiii. Then, Jesus went back to the basics of piety - of faith - and served up some delicious practices of piety that increase a disciples' devotion to God, while giving glory and honor TO God...not for others to praise them, but for God alone to give them the reward for their devotion.
- xiv. Sometimes, I think we miss that fact that God WANTS to give us a reward for our devotion. We feel like we don't deserve it - or we've been told we don't deserve it. We can't EARN it on our own merit...but God IS PLEASED to give us a reward when our devotion is focused on HIM!
- xv. Let's start with the practice of piety called **almsgiving**...verse 2...

## B. READ MATTHEW 6:2-4

- i. In the Jewish tradition, people were encouraged and even expected to give so that the Temple priests could help the poor, who had nothing, and who came to the church to be cared for.
- ii. This isn't unlike the care WE give to those in need through the White Gift Fund, special offerings, and our regular offerings through the General Fund. Some of our ministries are focused on helping those in need. It all began with this Jewish tradition. Giving to the church for ministry is nothing new. It's something the church has done in this community a long time.
- iii. YET, Jesus' caution is that no one should give in order for others to SEE that, and give them a pat on the back for doing it. He says, "...like the hypocrites..." The greek word here for *hypocrite* has the sense of a **stage actor** who is playing a role to get applause. Don't practice your piety to get applause from humans.
- iv. A thank you from those receiving care is always appropriate. A thankful church stewardship team is good.
- v. But a pure motivation to give because there's a need is what God desires.
- vi. Now, in the Temple, there weren't actually trumpets that sounded when people gave a large sum. And, it's impossible for your right hand to not know what your left hand is doing, right? So, these are metaphorical statements that both point to one truth: when you give to the church or the poor, just give because there's a need and not to be thanked, noticed, or rewarded by anyone but God. Be humble about it and just give because God loves a cheerful giver (it says in 2 Cor. 9:7). Practice the piety of giving as an act of worship to God, waiting for Jesus' return to get any reward at all.
- vii. Let's move to prayer...verse 5...

### C. READ MATTHEW 6:5-15

- i. Public prayer in the Temple was a given...very similar to when we pray here in the sanctuary. Praying in the streets was not something that the Jewish people did...there was no need for that. So, again, Jesus was making a point: when you practice the piety of prayer, don't be long, loud, wordy, or have one eye open to see if people are nodding their heads, agreeing with their groans, or giving you affirmation for your prayers.
- ii. Prayers are for us to speak and for God alone to hear. Jesus does say, when you pray, go into your prayer closet and pray in secret. That's not a legalistic requirement, but an invitation to check your motivations. You can pray self-piously in your prayer closet, but there won't be anyone to respond but God. That's the point, no matter where you pray. The reward you're seeking should be ONLY from God.

- iii. Pray simply. Pray authentically. Pray silently, if you don't have the words, and the Holy Spirit will pray for you.
- iv. "Not like the pagans...", Jesus said, who have to heap up a lot of words to invoke their many gods...none of which will answer even a single prayer.
- v. Pray to God. Be changed by God. Be rewarded by God alone.
- vi. As an interlude, Matthew places Jesus' model prayer here within this part of the sermon about prayer. I'm not sure Jesus actually stopped to teach this prayer here, but it makes sense for Matthew to include it here since it's an important prayer.
- vii. We won't go into detail with this prayer, but I want to challenge you to join me in something. If you have your phone with you, take it out and set an alarm for **Noon every day**. As you're doing that, and if you can label your alarms, label it Lord's Prayer. Now, everyday at noon, your alarm will go off with the label "Lord's Prayer." At that moment, take 30 seconds to pray the Lord's Prayer. In doing so, you will be joining hundreds of thousands of people all over the world, and in the Global Methodist Church, who are praying that prayer at noon. In the eastern time zone, we'll be praying all at the same time. Stacy and I have been doing this for over a week now...and we've prayed the Lord's prayer in the car, riding bikes, while hiking, while floating down the Clarion River, while eating lunch, and I can't wait to see the other places. Join us!!!
- viii. Then, finally, Jesus moves into the final basic of piety...fasting...verse 16.

#### **D. READ MATTHEW 6:16-18**

- i. Fasting is the voluntary abstention from food for a prescribed period of time as a sign of religious devotion to God. In the Jewish tradition, they fasted on Mondays and Thursdays, typically.
- ii. Jesus simply said, don't make a big deal about looking haggard and gaunt when you fast. Notice He didn't say, IF you fast, but WHEN. Jesus' expectation is that you will fast as a follower along your journey. Maybe not every week, but in seasons of deep prayer or during Lent or when you're pressing into God's heart to heal someone or during a struggle.
- iii. When you do, take a shower and look normal, not disheveled and hungry. Oil on your head and washed face is the normal mode of cleaning and anointing.
- iv. Your fasting will be seen by God, who will reward you when Jesus returns.
- v. When you fast, give up food for a day, or technology. Give up social media or anything that has your attention over your focus on the Big Story of God.
- vi. The practice of fasting is a basic of the Christian faith.

### 3. Application

- A. Giving to the poor, praying to God, and fasting...the basics of your devotion to God...for all those who are becoming Kingdom people.
- B. But why? What are the outcomes of this kind of singular focus on our Father in heaven?
  - i. First is obvious because Jesus said is 4-5 times - **God will reward you.**
    - a. Matthew 6:19-21 says, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
    - b. Let God give you the reward He desires to give you in the end. Don’t drink all your pop before the meal begins...for the reward that God has will make the ones we get now from humans seem foolish and cheap.
  - ii. Practicing piety like Jesus asks is an **Antidote to pride.**
    - a. Proverbs 16:18 reminds us, “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.”
    - b. When you practice these basics of piety with a single motivation to honor God and increase your devotion to God - and not for human reward - it’s an antidote to pride, destruction, a haughty spirit, and worrying about what others think.
    - c. Let God get the glory and let God’s smile be upon you for your humility.
  - iii. And, remember, this is a **functional lifestyle.**
    - a. I had a mentor who liked to say, “The Christian lifestyle is a very functional lifestyle.” He’s right. Giving helps others. Praying changes you and moves the hearts of those who are praying. Fasting opens your heart to more of what God wants for you in your life.
    - b. Even though you have to wait to get the full reward God wants to give you, you can begin to be BLESSED NOW, for the rewards that you KNOW will be coming.

### 4. Conclusion

- A. Remember the basics of piety! Give. Pray. Fast. If I had to wrap this up in one sentence, I’d say: **The practice of humble piety to God gives us an audience of One who loves to reward us.**
- B. That reminds me of a song by Christian band Big Daddy Weave, which will be our closing reflection: *I come on my knees, To lay down before You, Bringing all that I am, Longing only to know You, Seeking Your face, And not only Your hand, I find You embracing me, Just as I am*

*And I lift these songs To You and You alone As I sing to You In my praises  
make Your home  
To my audience of one You are Father, and You are Son As your spirit flows  
free Let it find within me A heart that beats to praise You  
And now just to know You more Has become my great reward To see Your  
kingdom come And Your will be done I only desire to be Yours Lord.*

- C. Give. Pray. Fast. Let's DO THIS! Class dismissed!
- D. Let's pray...