

MATTHEW 6

SERMON ON THE MOUNT CONTINUED

For further reading on the Sermon on the Mount, see John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/sermon-mount-light-temple>.

Matthew 6:1–4. Stage 12: Each Person Is to Give Donations for the Poor

Beginning in chapter 6, the style of the sermon shifts into a different mode. The next section of this text contains no reference to the old law of Moses. Stylistically there is also a sharp contrast as the text moves on to a new stage of Jesus’s instruction. Here there will be a greater emphasis on personal righteousness, secret inward growth, as well as caring for the needs of this world. These requirements include almsgiving, prayer, forgiveness, fasting, and total dedication to God of all that one has. These personal offerings are given voluntarily, in secret, and are to be seen only by God.

Almsgiving is the first requirement encountered in connection with the establishment of this next level of progression in the covenant order of the kingdom. If done in secret, the giving of one’s substance is a mark of profound righteousness that will reap open rewards.

The word translated as “alms” in verse 1 by the King James Version is the Greek *dikaiosynē*, usually translated as “righteousness” (the word in verses 2 and 3 is different, indicating the more specific act of giving to the poor). Thus, Jesus’s remarks cover more than just the sorts of charity-giving normally thought of as alms, but rather His words apply broadly to any act of goodness or righteousness. The uncelebrated nature of all these good works truly makes them worthy of being designated as “righteousness.”

The image of sounding a trumpet to announce acts of righteousness is obviously an exaggeration, but it underscores the kindness of Jesus’s instruction, for no one is likely to blow a trumpet. There is nothing wrong with public righteousness per se, but what is important about acts of true charity is that they are

done for their own sake, not just to be seen of men. Righteous deeds, of course, do not need to be performed in total secrecy, but they should be done without pretense, posturing, or seeking praise.

Jesus warns that people who do good while seeking the “glory of men” indeed already have their reward. It is a great eternal truth that God “granteth unto men according to their desire” (Alma 29:4). If all that we see is an opportunity to impress our neighbor, then we will have that but nothing more. The refrain “they have their reward” appears again in verses 5 and 16.

The invitation to benefit those who stand in need stands together with the law of the gospel as mentioned in Doctrine and Covenants 104:18. It also goes together with the law of consecration (see stage 16 below). It is possible that Jesus’s requirement that alms must be given “in the secret [place]” alludes to the Chamber of Secrets in the temple of Herod (mentioned in the Mishnah) into which wealthy donors could secretly deposit their gifts for the poor to draw support from anonymously. Since the Jewish law discouraged giving more than 20 percent of one’s means to the temple, Jesus may well have taught that such a limit set the standard too low.

Giving to the poor has long been a requirement placed upon the Lord’s covenant people. In order to establish Zion, there are to be no poor among the Lord’s people (see Moses 7:18). King Benjamin emphasized that giving to those in need is one of the main spiritual attributes of a righteous, covenant person: “Ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor” (Mosiah 4:16). Giving to the poor, he said, is necessary for “retaining a remission of your sins from day to day” (Mosiah 4:26). It is also an essential prerequisite for entering into a covenant with God, having “no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2; see 5:5).

Matthew 6:5–13. Stage 13: Prayers Are Offered, Both Privately and in Small Groups

The next step in the Sermon on the Mount involves prayer. Although not limited to the temple, prayer was deeply connected with the very purpose of the temple.

Outside the temple, one is to pray especially in the home, for these are also holy places. We are told to pray privately, in secret, in our closets, and not in order to be seen in public. After advising people against improper ways to pray to attract attention or with vain repetitions (6:5, 7–8), the Lord instructed His faithful followers with a group prayer. The private prayer, “when *you* [singular] pray” (6:6), shifts to “when ye [plural] pray” (6:9)—that is, in a group.

The Lord’s Prayer begins by calling upon the Father in a very personal way. While God had been addressed as “Father” by Isaiah and in the Psalms,¹ Jesus addressed His Father by calling him “Abba,” indicating an intimate, pure, simple, trusting relationship between a child and his father (see Mark 14:38; Galatians 4:6). “Abba” is a familiar form of the Hebrew word for “father,” *ab*. Jesus invited His disciples to pray using this personal approach to God.

Then there are three “thy” petitions. First, “hallowed be *thy* name” (6:10). This is not just a declaration but also a request, asking Heavenly Father *to hallow* His name, to let His name be kept sacred. Second, “*thy* kingdom come,” prays for the fruits of missionary work and looks forward to the millennial kingdom of Christ. And third, “*thy* will be done,” like Jesus’s prayer in Gethsemane, submits oneself to God’s will.

The phrase “on earth as it is in heaven” then forms a bridge from these three “thy” petitions to the following three “we” petitions. This transition teaches us that actions on the part of God require corresponding actions by us. If the Father’s name is to be hallowed, we must receive spiritual bread of life daily (6:11). If the kingdom is to come, we must obtain forgiveness and live in peace, forgiving one another (6:12). If God’s will is to be done, we must shun the temptation of evil (6:13). Thus, each prayer, in its own way, presupposes a covenantal relationship: Give us as we give; forgive us as we forgive; deliver us as we do—not our will, but Thine.

The petition for bread (6:11) may refer not only to our bodies’ need for food but also to our need for Jesus as the bread of life. The Greek word translated as “daily” is an unusual word (*epiousion*). It refers to “supernal” bread, to the “bread of life,” which is Christ and the word of God, like spiritual manna from heaven (John 6:48).

The request for forgiveness (Matthew 6:12), is properly conditioned upon our forgiving others. This is the great principle of purity—that we are forgiven *as* (meaning “when, how, inasmuch as, or to the extent that”) we have forgiven others (see Doctrine and Covenants 82:1).

Our final request, for help in facing tests and trials and being delivered “from **the** Evil One” (*apo tou ponērou*; Matthew 6:13), does not imply that God is the one who leads us into temptation (see James 1:13). Indeed, the Joseph Smith Translation renders this final petition as “*suffer us not to be led into temptation*” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 6:14).

In the holy context of this great sermon, the Lord’s Prayer does not end with a simple “amen” but with solemn words of praise to God, called a doxology. Ordinary prayers could end without a doxology (as in Luke 11:4). But the extended ending of the Lord’s Prayer, “for thine is *the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, amen,*” signals sanctity and solemnity usually associated with holy temple ordinances as on the Day of Atonement. On that day, when the people heard the high priest pronounce the name of the Lord in the temple, they bowed their heads and exclaimed, “Praised be the name of his *glorious kingdom forever and eternally!*” According to rabbinic sources, such acknowledgments of the kingdom and glory of God were regularly used in the temple at the time of Jesus.

The use of the Lord’s Prayer as a group prayer is documented also from early Christian times. Some texts document participants standing in a circle around Jesus at the center.

The early church father Origen understood the Lord’s Prayer to be a model or outline. Origen seemingly objected to fixed prayers, instructing his readers to learn to pray for great and heavenly things. The rabbis similarly expressed strong objections against the repetition of fixed prayers, recommending that prayers should vary a little each time.²

Matthew 6:14–15. Stage 14: Forgiveness Is Humbly and Prayerfully Requested of God

As mentioned above, the request for forgiveness in verse 12 is conditioned upon our forgiveness of others. To emphasize this essential point, the Lord expands this point here. If we do not forgive people for their sins and trespasses, we cannot expect the Father to forgive us, for forgiveness will be received from God to the extent that we forgive those who sin against us. Reiterating this requirement allows time at this point for a double check.

Overcoming sin, removing impurity, and reconciling with God was one of the most important functions of the temple of Solomon. Five times in his dedicatory prayer, Solomon asked the Lord to hear the prayers of the people there and to forgive them their sins: “When they pray toward this place; yea, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place; and when thou hearest, forgive.”³ Christ’s new law adds that forgiveness, reconciliation, and holding no hard feelings against each other are necessary in order for our requests to be heard of God.

Matthew 6:16–18. Stage 15: Fasting, Washings, and Anointings Are Done in Private

Fasting and prayer stand together here in the Sermon on the Mount, and they are closely linked to each other throughout the New Testament in overcoming Satan and in ordaining elders.⁴

People fasted on various occasions in biblical times. John the Baptist fasted (Mark 1:6).

A new order of fasting is now taught. In addition to requiring a secret inward righteousness, fasting is to be accompanied with a simple anointing of the head and washing of the face (Matthew 6:17). Washing the face, the head, the feet, the hands, or other parts of the body is symbolic of becoming completely pure and clean “every whit” (John 13:10). Similarly, the righteous desire to become clean from the blood and sins they encounter in this world. When a disciple seeks the Lord in true fasting and prayer in such a condition of inward and outward purity, the Lord promises that He will see and reward the supplicant openly in heaven.

Fasting served many purposes in early Christianity. Among them was preparing to receive ordinances: “Other fasts are to be held one or two days prior to baptism,” according to Didache 7:4. Again, here the disciple is promised that the Lord will see and reward openly (see Matthew 6:4, 6, 18).

Matthew 6:19–24. Stage 16: Treasures Are Laid Up or Consecrated unto Heaven

Time, talents, and resources are to be consecrated, put at God’s disposal, and offered up with an eye single to God’s glory.

This section continues the theme of proper orientation—just as we should not perform outwardly righteous acts of prayer or charitable giving to get public acclaim, so too should we shun the acquisition of worldly goods in preference to the rewards that come from heaven and will be laid up in heaven.

6:21. Jesus offers a litmus test for human priorities in verse 21: that which we value most betrays our truest desires. As the eyes are the window through which sense perception enters the human mind (they were understood anciently as a source of light), the lightness or darkness of our eyes colors our understanding of the world and its value.

6:22. The disciple is required individually to have an eye single (*haplous*) to the glory of God (6:22), which refers not only to being pure but also to being single-minded, with whole-hearted, long-term dedication, being ready to sacrifice for the kingdom of God. Accordingly, regularly holding a Church calling and paying a full tithing yield blessings beyond our imagination. The pure eye does not deviate from the course that God has ordained. The text here also presupposes a totally committed community, serving and working individually and together for the benefit of the whole. By such exacting devotion to God, all disciples are promised that their “whole body shall be full of light” (6:22). Indeed, further light and knowledge is what the righteous continually seek.

6:24. The duty is to serve a single master, and slave-law language in this section drives home the point: Disciples have been marked as slaves belonging to God, and therefore what they have and are belongs to Him. Hence, it would be a breach of covenant (or contract) to serve another lord. Stated in contrast, one is not to serve mammon (or money), for ultimately no one can serve (or belong to) two masters. Verse 24 uses the strong language of Roman slavery. Note that independence is not an option—humanity is either to be in servitude to God or to mammon (a transliteration of the Hebrew *mamon*, meaning “property” or “stuff”). This image of servitude appears in Paul and John as well.

Matthew 6:25–34. Stage 17: God Will Provide Food, Drink, and Garments as Glorious as King Solomon’s, Especially to His Chosen Leaders

At this point in the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi 13 (and presumably likewise in the original delivery of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6), Jesus assured the chosen disciples that their needs would be taken care of by God. Their worries were calmed. Such anxieties come particularly from the feelings of vulnerability that come when one turns things completely over to the Lord. The disciples are promised that they shall have sufficient for their needs.

The emphasis then turns to clothing (endowing) the ordained disciples. They are promised that God will clothe them in glorious clothing. As the lilies of the field (small wildflowers that naturally grow on the hillsides in Galilee), the chosen disciples will be clothed by their loving Heavenly Father, and even more splendidly than Solomon himself was ever attired.

In addition to giving practical assurances to His disciples that they will have sufficient for their needs, Jesus speaks of clothing or raiment in words that are richly symbolic. The basic Greek word for being clothed is *enduō* (see *endumatos*, “raiment,” in 6:25, 28 and *endusesthe*, “get dressed, put on,” in 6:25; Jesus also uses this word in Luke 24:49 shortly after His Resurrection when He tells His Apostles to remain in the city “until ye be endued with power from on high.”) This word has three main meanings, all of which can be pertinent to the temple endowment. The first is “to dress, or to clothe someone,” or “to clothe oneself in, put on.” The second is, figuratively, to take on characteristics, virtues, intentions. The third is an endowment, a gift of assets or a dowery that will provide security and will steadily generate useful revenues. The meaning of the English word *endue* (or spelled *indue*, from the Latin) likewise conveys these meanings: “to furnish, to invest, to bless.” Joseph Smith’s diary uses the spellings *endow* and *endue* interchangeably; for example, when the Prophet prayed that all the elders might “receive an endument in thy house.”

Thus, in this section of the Sermon at the Temple, Jesus can be understood as promising to give His stalwarts more than just garments that offer physical protection for the body, although garments do this too. He also speaks of endowing the disciples with powers and virtues more glorious than Solomon’s. King Solomon, of course, was the most famous temple builder of ancient Israel, and so this allusion strongly invites readers to think of much more than just ordinary clothing. All the imagery of priestly and royal kingship are evoked here.

More is also involved than the promise of nourishment to the body or of material well-being: “Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” (Matthew 6:25). All the promised blessings flow from bowing first to God and seeking His kingdom and His righteousness (6:33). Ultimately, at the judgment bar of God, all people will either stand unclean and naked or they shall be “clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness” (2 Nephi 9:14).

Notes

1 See Isaiah 63:16; Psalms 68:5; 89:26; 103:13.

2 See generally John W. Welch, “The Lord’s Prayers,” *Ensign*, January 1976. For an in-depth discussion of the Lord’s Prayer, see John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 131ff, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/sermon-mount-light-temple>.

3 1 Kings 8:30; also 8:34, 36, 39, 50.

4 See Matthew 4:2; 17:21; 1 Corinthians 7:5; Acts 14:23.

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