

OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

- A. Introduction: Jesus warned that the years leading up to His return will be marked by religious deception (false christs and false prophets). In this series we are looking at who Jesus is, why He came to earth, and what gospel He preached so that we are equipped to recognize counterfeit gospels. Matt 24:4-5; 11; 23-24
1. According to the Bible, there will be a global government, economy, and religion in place that will welcome the ultimate false christ, a man known as Antichrist. Rev 13:1-18
 - a. These conditions won't come out of a vacuum, and a universal, antichrist religion is developing even now. This religion sounds "Christian" because it uses Bible verses taken out of context.
 - b. As part of our effort to become familiar with Jesus as He is revealed in the Bible so that we won't be deceived, we are considering what it means to read in context.
 1. Context in the Bible includes much more than the verse before and the verse after a particular passage (although that's part of it). There is a historical and cultural context to the Bible.
 2. The Scriptures were written by real people to real people about real things. Everything in the Bible was written by someone (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) to someone about something. Those three factors set context.
 - c. Jesus was born into a real culture populated by real people, 1st century men and women in Israel.
 1. Based on the writings of their prophets (the Old Testament) they were looking for the Messiah (Jesus) and had certain understandings and expectations about why and what He came to do.
 2. Understanding their times and culture helps us to properly interpret the Bible. Its verses can't mean something to us that they would not have meant to the original readers and hearers.
 2. To help us understand the role of historical and cultural context when interpreting Scripture, we're looking at the Sermon on the Mount—the source of several verses that have been taken out of context, misinterpreted, and misapplied. We've covered a little over half of it and made these points
 - a. Jesus wasn't talking to or about Christians as delivered His sermon. There were no Christians yet because He hadn't been to the Cross. Jesus was speaking to Old Covenant men and women. This doesn't mean that Christians can't learn from the Sermon. But our interpretation of a specific passage must be consistent with the historical and cultural context in which Jesus spoke.
 1. Jesus addressed people who, based on the writings of the Old Testament prophets expected the Messiah to establish His kingdom on earth. However, the prophets weren't clearly shown that the physical kingdom would be preceded by God's kingdom in the hearts of men.
 2. Jesus had to broaden their understanding not only the kingdom, but of the righteousness necessary to enter His kingdom. Everything the people knew about righteousness came from the Pharisees and scribes who preached and practiced a false righteousness. As we read the Sermon on the Mount we must remember that Jesus had the Pharisees in mind as He exposed the false righteousness that they lived and taught.
 3. Jesus was preparing Old Covenant men to receive a New Covenant, a new relationship between God and men that would be made possible by His death and resurrection. He introduced, but did not elaborate on concepts that would be fully explained after His resurrection.
 - b. Matt 5:3-20—Because Jesus was going to establish a religion of the heart (the kingdom within) He opened His sermon with the characteristics of those who qualify for His kingdom (the beatitudes—blessed are the poor in spirit, those that mourn, the peacemakers, etc.). None of them are natural traits. All refer to spiritual conditions and attitudes.
 - c. Matt 5:21-48—The Pharisees kept the letter of God's Law but missed the spirit behind it: Love God and love your fellow man. Using six examples from the Law, Jesus exposed their false interpretations and presented the true spirit of the Law. He gave illustrations of principles in the Law rather than rules of conduct. The examples are actually secondary to the principles.

- d. Matt 6:1-18—Using three examples of righteous acts (giving to the poor, prayer, fasting) Jesus revealed that the Pharisees did what they did to be seen of men, but that true righteous living is aimed at pleasing our Father in Heaven and living with the consciousness that He sees what you do and knows why you do it. Jesus wasn't expounding on the rules for giving, praying, and fasting, He was dealing with motives. We have more to say about this section of the sermon.
- B. God in Heaven was a commonly used expression among Old Covenant men and women. In the Old Testament the phrase expressed God's omnipotence (I Kings 8:27), His majesty and dominion over creation (II Chron 20:6), His power and might (Ps 115:3), His omniscience (Ps 11:4; Ps 33:14-15), His holiness and purity (Deut 26:15; Isa 57:15).
1. Matt 6:1—Notice Jesus began this portion of the sermon by referring to God as your Father in Heaven. This is the fourth time that He has referred to God as Father.
 - a. In Matt 5:16 Jesus introduced the Father as One who is to be glorified by His children through their works. In Matt 5:45-48—He spoke of God as a good, kind Father who should be emulated by His children (lit. sons). In chapter 6 Jesus will tell His audience to do what they do with the awareness that they have a Father in Heaven who sees them, cares for them, and rewards them.
 - b. Through His words, Jesus was introducing a revolutionary concept. As pointed out in previous lessons, the Jews had no concept of an individual Father-son relationship between God and man.
 1. Almighty God was the Father of Israel in general as their Creator, Deliverer, and Covenant maker (Isa 63:16; Isa 64:8; Jer 31:9). They referred to Abraham as their father.
 2. When Jesus referred to God as His Father, He enraged the Pharisees and they accused Him of blasphemy. John 5:18; John 10:30-33
 - c. Remember that God was not yet the Father of anyone in Jesus' audience. No one could be born of God until the price for sin was paid at the Cross. Jesus was preparing them for what was to come.
 2. Jesus told His audience not to give, pray or fast to be seen of men (to get the praise of men). He told that your Father in Heaven sees why you do what you do and will reward you accordingly.
 - a. Jesus wasn't giving rules for giving, praying, or fasting, He was broadening their understanding of what it means to live a righteous life in contrast to how the Pharisees lived.
 - b. As part of His instruction, He gave them a model of prayer, not only to illustrate how to approach their Father in Heaven, but because it was culturally appropriate. Every public teacher gave prayer models to His disciples.
 1. Note the context (Matt 6:5-8). Don't pray to be seen of men or pray like the heathen (non-Jews) do. Effective prayer comes out of relationship with God as your Father and it involves fervency and faith as opposed to lots of words.
 2. Jesus wasn't giving them a prayer to be memorized and prayed word-for-word. He was illustrating principle behind the practice of righteous prayer.
 3. Jesus began with "our Father", or approach God as your Father. "Our" was culturally appropriate. It was a maxim or common saying of the Jews that a man should not pray alone but join with others. So, whether they were at the synagogue with others or alone, they used the plural in prayer—our God,
 - a. v9—Our Father in Heaven (remember that God in Heaven was a familiar concept) hallowed be your name (You). Live with the awareness that Almighty God in Heaven is also your Father, and desire that He be glorified and honored.
 - b. v10—Pray that your Father's kingdom and reign come and that His will be done. The true gospel is God-ward, not man-ward. Jesus died to turn us from living for self to living for God. II Cor 5:15
 - c. v11-13—Live with the awareness that your Father in Heaven will meet your needs for daily bread, forgiveness of sin, and deliverance from evil.
 1. Temptation implies assaults from Satan and afflictive circumstances. "Lead us not" is a

Hebraism; God is said to do what He only allows.

2. End your prayer with praise and amen. Amen implies confident resting in God with full assurance that your requests will be fulfilled by your Father.
 - d. v14-15—People sometimes interpret this passage to mean that you won't go to Heaven if you don't forgive people. Forgiveness is definitely a trait that sons of God are to express. But forgiving others doesn't merit (earn us) anything.
 1. Jesus is broadening their understanding of what it means to live a righteous life. It comes from the heart. Remember, Jesus had the Pharisees and their false righteousness in mind.
 2. They retaliated and extracted revenge. They knew little about forgiveness, mercy, or justice. They did not forgive until there was revenge and restitution. Matt 23:23
 3. The Pharisees relied on external performance but failed to love God or man. The spirit behind the Law is: Love God and love your fellow man. Matt 22:37-40
 4. Matt 5:43-48—Jesus earlier told His listeners that they are to live as children of their Father who is kind and merciful to all. The Law of God says: Love your neighbor (Lev 19:18).
 - a. The Pharisees taught that only other Jews were their neighbor and that it was a right, almost a duty, to hate non-Jews. They thought that they honored God by doing so.
 - b. Jesus told them to love their enemies—bless them, do good to them, pray for them. Your treatment of people should reflect your Father in Heaven. He gives rain and sun to the good and the evil.
 1. Anyone can love people who love them and are kind to them. The publicans do as much. The publicans were Jews who collected taxes for the Roman government and were despised for it.
 2. Your Father in Heaven does not deal with people based on who they are, what they deserve, or what they have done to Him. Neither should you. Jesus (and later the apostles in the epistles) will make it clear that after all that God has forgiven us, we have no right to refuse to forgive (to exact revenge on) others.
 - c. Jesus exhorted them: Be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect. Perfect comes from a word that means complete or finished. It's from a noun that means to set out for a definite point or goal.
 1. Jesus will die on the Cross to make it possible for sinners to become sons of God through the new birth (the kingdom within). Jesus in His humanity is the pattern for the family. Rom 8:29
 2. This new birth is the beginning of a process of transformation that will make us like Jesus in character and power, holiness and love. (His audience doesn't know all of this yet. Jesus was introducing concepts that will be fully developed later.)
 3. Matt 5:48—You, therefore, must be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect [that is, grow into complete maturity of godliness in mind and character, having reached the proper height of virtue and integrity] (Amp).
 - d. Matt 5:16—Sons of God live in a way that brings honor and glory to their Father. They express His character through their good works.
- C. Back to chapter 6—As Jesus instructed His listeners on true righteous living, not only did He tell them not to do what they do to impress men, He tells them not live for this life only as He begins to deal with priorities.
1. v19-21—Jesus told His audience not to store up treasures on earth but to store them up in heaven. Jesus is broadening their understanding of the kingdom. It is more than a material, physical kingdom.
 - a. This world in its present condition is not our home. We're only passing through. This life is transitory. Moths and rust corrupt. Thieves break in and steal. But Jesus tells them that treasure in heaven is safe from destruction.
 - b. Jesus tells them to live their lives in such a way that they store up treasures in Heaven because, where your treasure is, your heart is. Treasure is not limited to wealth. Treasure is what is important to you. Jesus wasn't saying that we can't make money or have a savings account or drive

a nice car. Jesus is dealing with righteous motives.

2. v22-23—Jesus told them that they must have a single eye. A single eye is a metaphor for simplicity of intention and purity of affection. A single eyed person is a single minded person. A person with a single eye has his aim on the kingdom of Heaven in his giving, prayer, fasting, and material treasures.
 - a. If you have a single eye, singleness of purpose—to store up treasure in Heaven, or live for your Father’s glory, live to advance His kingdom—you’ll be full of light, the light of God.
 - b. Jesus contrasted a single eye with an evil eye. To the Jews an evil eye meant one who was envious or covetous. (Jesus has the Pharisees and their righteousness in mind as He speaks. They were greedy, covetous, and sensual. Matt 23:25; 28)
 1. A single eye seeks God’s will, God’s kingdom, and God’s glory. The Pharisees sought their own glory. John 5:44
 2. Jesus told His listeners: If your eye is evil—if you are covetous—you’ll be full of darkness but you will think that it is light. That’s the kind of light the Pharisees had.
 - c. v24—Jesus made Himself clear to His audience. You can’t serve God and money. (Mammon means riches or the power of money. Mammon was the Chaldean god of money.) If you have two masters, you’ll love one and hate the other (hate means love less.) Your affection will be divided.
 1. This would have been a revolutionary statement to His listeners because money has the power to get the basics of life—food, clothing, and shelter. His audience no doubt wondered, “If we don’t serve money, if we don’t store up treasure on this earth, how will we live?”
 2. Jesus then gives them a wonderful illustration of why they do not have to be concerned about where the necessities of life will come from.
 3. v25-34—Jesus told His audience not to worry about where the basics of life will come from because they have a heavenly Father who cares for them and will provide them as we seek His kingdom first.
 - a. Seek ye first the kingdom is the same thing as store up treasure in Heaven, have a single eye, and serve God not mammon. Jesus is still talking about their aim in life, their motive in what they do.
 - b. Take no thought in the Greek indicates something that is divided or distracted. If your eye is not single, you’ll be distracted by the power of money which can get you the basics of life.
 - c. But Jesus tells His listeners: Take no thought, be not anxious about what you’ll eat, drink, or wear. Life is of more value than meat and the body of more value than clothes.
 1. How did you get the life and body that you’re worrying about? It came from God. If He gave you life, why would He not give you what is needed to sustain life? Our life and body is about more than food and clothing. It’s for the kingdom and God’s glory.
 2. What Father cares for his animals, but not for his children? If He cares for them He’ll take care of you because He’s your Father. Stature can mean height or length of life. Jesus was saying who can add one moment to his life span by worrying? Your Father will take care of you.
 - d. If God clothes the lilies and the grass of the field He’ll clothe you, oh ye of little faith. This is the first time Jesus makes reference to faith. In the kingdom Jesus has come to establish, the righteous live by faith, by confidence in their heavenly Father.
 - c. People with no heavenly Father (Gentiles) have to seek after these things. You have a heavenly Father so you don’t have to worry about tomorrow.
- D. Conclusion: In His sermon Jesus was broadening His audience’s understanding as He prepared them to receive the new relationship that He would establish between God and man, that of Father and son.
1. Jesus came to make it possible for sinners to become sons of God. The true gospel produces inward transformation that results in outward demonstration of the inward change.
 2. Jesus is preparing them for the fact that sons of God have both privileges (He will take care of us) and responsibilities (to bring Him glory and honor). Lots more next week!