

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

HEAR - (ROMANS 10:17; MATTHEW 7:24-27).

BELIEVE - (HEBREWS 11:6; MARK 16:15-16).

REPENT - (ACTS 2:38; 17:30; LUKE 13:3).

CONFESS - (MATTHEW 10:32,33; ACTS 8:36).

BE BAPTIZED - (ACTS 2:38; GALATIANS 3:27).

LIVE FAITHFULLY UNTO DEATH - (REV. 2:10).

UPON THE ROCK

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Matthew 6

Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. “Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body

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he sustain himself. We are dependent upon God for our needs. This is the intent of our Lord's message. The poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3) realize their need for God. Why? Because they, in and of themselves are destitute. Our families need God. Our communities need God. Our country needs God. Our world needs God. Some have concluded there is no God, and many who claim that God does exist do not trust Him like they should. Neither realize to the fullest their dependance upon the Almighty. I have a question for you, do you believe in God? If you do, stop worrying and trust God-it's that simple. When a Christian takes thought/is anxious about circumstances, his focus has shifted from trust in God to a lack of trust in God. Watch this please: "Take no thought for your life" (Matthew 6:25). Jesus says do not be anxious about food, drink, or clothing. Why? Because the Heavenly Father provides these blessings for His children. Are we not better than birds? We are indeed. The Father feeds the birds (Matthew 6:26). "And why take ye thought for raiment" (Matthew 6:28). The Father clothes the grass of the field correct? He sure does. Will He not also "much more" clothe us (Matthew 6:30)? Yes! Remember worrying about problems has never solved them. "Therefore take no thought" (Matthew 6:31), and "Take therefore no thought for the morrow" (Matthew 25:34). The Father provides. Isn't that a mind-settling- thought. Our God provides for His children. He simply asks us to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Brethren, there's a lot going on in our world. It's true. Quit worrying. There is a God (Hebrews 11:6).

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will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." Matthew 6:1-34

Living in the Presence of God

Michael Gors

*"You will show me the **path** of life; in your **presence** is the fullness of joy; at your right hand are **pleasures** for evermore", Psalm 16:11.* The pursuits of humanity revolve around the pleasures of life. Many choose paths that they believe will enhance or bring pleasure to their lives. Solomon wrote, in Ecclesiastes, of a few paths that most of humanity takes to find pleasures in life. Most of them are as common today as they were the day Solomon put his pen to paper, such as: work, women, wine, education, entertainment and money. If these are the only pursuits you have, especially in the absence of God, those pursuits will inevitably be abused and lead to a dead end in life physically and most tragically spiritually. Solomon in His old age warned us in his book about the dead ends of these pursuits and finished the letter telling all of us in every generation where fulfillment comes, *Fear*

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God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man”, Eccl. 12:13 Quite literally fearing God and keeping His commands is what makes man whole or complete, and yet so many miss this fundamental lesson. If we can silence ourselves and listen to God, he has told us time and again that contentment, true peace and joy come from following Him. Genesis 1 teaches us that God has to be present for things to take order and make sense. Before God started his work things were “without form and void”, Genesis 1:2. Lesson number one in book number one of the Bible is God exists and we need him in our lives for our lives to make sense. It is David who writes with clarity how to find the path that leads to life and where to find pleasures evermore in this life and the next. It all comes from living in the presence of God.

To live in the presence of God seems too high, lofty and unattainable. A concept or ideal that simply cannot be achieved. God is so High, Holy, Pure, Powerful, and Majestic, we may ask ourselves how can I a mere mortal human being, a man made of clay, stand in the Presence of such an awesome God?! What does it mean to live in the presence of God? First, it is to **Acknowledge** His existence. “For without faith it is impossible to please Him, **For they that come to God MUST believe that HE is...**” Hebrews 11:6.(Emphasis mine, MJG) It is imperative that his people acknowledge His existence in order to be pleasing to Him and be rewarded by Him. Both evidence and common sense say if there is a design, then there must be a designer. Look at the solar system, plant life, the human body, the human eye, etc. All of it shows a design, therefore there has to be by necessity a designer. That Designer is Jehovah God!. Second, be **Aware** of His presence. Among the many people in the bible that could be used, David writes in detail his keen awareness of God’s presence. David faced Goliath with courage and faith that was based on his awareness of God’s activity in his life : David said to Saul, God is the one who delivered him from a lion and a bear and therefore it will be God who delivers the Philistine named Goliath into Israel’s hand by David! 1 Samuel 17:34-37. David walking on the Place roof, looking into the sky said, “Who is man that you are mindful or him to visit him...” Psalm 8 again he is aware of God being active. Consider also Psalm 139 David asked a series of questions reminding us all that God is aware of us and present and active in the lives of human beings. Because God does exist and we can be aware of His presence in our lives and the affairs of all nations, if we will stop, look and listen. We should therefore thirdly,

Even though we have achieved great advancements, we still have a problem. Do you know what it is? Yep, it’s worry. Friend, do you think we could get a team assembled from Nasa to work out a solution for worry? Or, would a group of engineers be able to breakthrough and completely remedy worry? All those great things that man can imagine and create are outstanding, but the One Who has made us is Christ (John 1:3; Colossians1:16) and Jesus Christ has the remedy for worry.

So, the high dollar question is, do you worry? If so, let’s take a look at a standard which has stood the test of time and investigate what it says about worry. Do you know that the Lord dealt with worry in His first recorded sermon in the Bible? The content in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is unmatched. The reason for this is because it comes from the Master Teacher Himself. There are many things about which we worry. See if any of these sound familiar: work, children (their choices, their peers, their driving, their problems), parents, dog and cat, housework, homework, America’s problems, the world’s problems, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Oh yeah, there’s always more about which to worry.

Yet, the Lord knows us all well enough to know that we would often struggle with worry. Jesus spoke to people who apparently were worried about food, drink, and clothing (Matthew 6:25ff). It sounds like we have found many more things about which to worry these days, but when it’ all boiled down, those were legitimate concerns then and are still worries today. A worry is a worry no matter who the person is nor what the circumstance might be.

What would Jesus say to us concerning worry? Simply put, He would say what He said to His followers in the sermon on the mount: “take no thought.” We often make things harder than they really are. Matthew 6:25ff are the words which came from the One Who created and knows each one of us. Concerning food, drink, and clothing, Jesus told His disciples “take no thought.” This means to “be not anxious” (Matthew 6:25; ASV). In time of trouble, we often take thought. We try to figure out what we can do. There are some things we can do of course, but worrying about them never solves them. Ask yourself if you ever worried a problem solved. Have you? I thought not. Do you know what one of our greatest problems is? We have failed to realize our dependence upon God. Think about the self-help books in our humanistic and pluralistic society. These deal with “self-esteem” and “self-improvement.” Good people, man did not create himself nor can

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not serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24).

Of course this is exactly what so many Christians try to do. They get their “ticket punched” by being baptized, they “go to church” whenever they do not have other “obligations,” and they contribute to the collection each week “if” they have anything that remains after they have taken care of their “necessities.” All the while clinging tightly to what this world has to offer. Sadly, they have convinced themselves that they can have their cake and eat it too!

The problem is that they have indeed set their affection on things on earth and not on things above (Col. 3:2) and they cannot see how skewed their vision has become. Their spiritual eyes are “evil.” Their distorted spiritual vision has deceived them. They cannot see that the allurements of the world “are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18)! “How great is that darkness” that leads one to eternal destruction (Matt. 16:23)!

When we have problems with our physical eyes and vision, we are typically anxious to do all that we can to correct them. Should we not also put forth every effort to make sure that our spiritual eyes are “single” as well? That they are healthy and properly focused and thus enabling us to live a pure and holy life? Whether we put forth that effort or not bears on our eternal destiny!

Worry

Matthew 6:23-34

Mark McDonald

Wow friend, how we have advanced! Can you believe that we’ve put a rover on Mars? Or, that a man jumped out of a spaceship 120,000 feet above the earth’s surface and lived to tell about it? Or, that electric cars are now motivating up and down the roads of this great land. Isn’t that something?! I really love creative minds don’t you? I mean, technology has come a long way. I couldn’t begin to tell you how to get a rover to Walmart let alone Mars. I don’t see how a man could jump so high from the sky and live. When I was younger, I fell out of a tree about six feet off the ground and almost broke my arm. The electric car, well, I suppose I could plug it up. Yet, there are people who have the knowledge and ingenuity to do such things as this and their work prospers others; for their advancements and breakthroughs we should be grateful.

and finally be **Aligned** with His way and truth. As we seek to be aligned with God we want to seek and do His will.

In this month’s issue of “Upon The Rock” it is assumed the reader already acknowledges the existence of God. It is our purpose this month to focus on being aware of His presence, and more to the point being aligned with His ways and truth. We invite you to read Matthew 6 and ponder it from the point of view of what it means to live in His presence. In Matthew 6 are the disciplines that are to be natural in our walk with God. Each one will reach into the heart to extract what should be present in the heart of a child of God. From charitable deeds to prayer and fasting, all of it points to what it means to seek God and His righteousness and to live in His presence.

Giving

Matthew 6:1-4

Brandon Britton

A family of four, well dressed, riding in a nice car, pulls into the parking lot of a restaurant. The family sits down, looks at all of the choices in the menu, places an order, enjoys a nice meal and looks over the bill at the conclusion. As the father pulls the money for the bill from his wallet he contemplates the service they received. The restaurant was very busy that day and they were a couple waiters short. Despite having to wait twice as many tables as he should have, their waiter did a good job. Their glasses were always full, their orders were correct, he checked on them regularly and brought them whatever they asked for. The dad knows 10% of the bill is the customary tip, but the waiter did such a good job, he decided to tip him 20%, a very generous gratuity.

Interestingly this family had just come from worship, where they focused on the Father of lights, from whom every good and perfect gift comes (James 1:17). They learned about the One in Whom we (not just this family of four, but the seven billion people who inhabit the entire planet) live and move and have our very being (Acts 17:28). They worshipped the God Who invited them to sit at His table and dine (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). They sang praises to the Father Who doesn’t keep their cups full, but running over (Psalm 23:5). They prayed to a God Who says ask and you shall receive (Matthew 7:7), and they

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counted their blessings one by one. When the time came, after considering all that He had done for them, to show their gratitude, they gave not the 20% they would tip the waiter, not even the 10% that is customary gratuity in a restaurant, but a mere 2.5%, which is the average percentage of income given by Christians in the United States. That same family (along with the average family in America), spends between 12 and 15% of their income, not on necessities like food and clothing (“And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” 1 Timothy 6:8), but on debt (luxuries). This is the state of giving for the average Christian in America. “Will a man rob God? Yet **ye have robbed me**. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? **In tithes and offerings**. Ye are cursed with a curse: for **ye have robbed me, even this whole nation**” (Malachi 3:8-9).

I understand that Christians do not live under the tithing system of the Old Covenant, but that doesn't change the truthfulness or application of this Scripture. I once heard a brother make a valid point about the law of the tithe and the Christian: if the Jews, who never knew the grace of God as revealed through the blood of His dear Son, thought it not too grievous to give 10% to Jehovah, how can we, who have tasted the heavenly goodness (Hebrews 6:4) and enjoyed the countless blessings of the New Covenant (which is far better, Hebrews 8:6) give any less? While not commanded by God in the New Testament, giving 10% should be the bare minimum that we would want to give with cheerful hearts considering how blessed we have been and how much we have prospered (2 Corinthians 9:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). **But we don't!**

In the church of Christ we place a great deal of emphasis on restoring the pattern for the New Testament church (and well we should), but we need to acknowledge that this includes the New Testament pattern for giving!

Although she wasn't a Christian, consider the pattern of giving demonstrated by the widow from Luke 21:1-4. “*And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had.*” I dare say that not a single one of us has ever seriously considered giving to God everything we have. I would venture a guess that we haven't even considered giving half. Keep in mind, simply the act of giving

opia is just the opposite condition in which a person usually has good vision far away, but cannot focus clearly on things that are close by.

Glaucoma is an eye disease that is a leading cause of blindness in the United States. This malady is the result of continually increasing pressure inside of the eye that eventually damages the optic nerve. Left untreated the end result is complete blindness.

Macular degeneration, presbyopia, astigmatism, and many other conditions and disorders can affect the eyes and ultimately one's eyesight. The impact of any of these eye problems on the quality of life of the individual afflicted is tremendous! One need only to close his eyes for a short time while attempting to go about his regular business to learn how negatively life is affected by diminished sight.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used the eyes and the loss of eyesight and the ensuing problems associated with it, to teach a lesson about how to live a pure and holy life. He said to them, "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness" (Mat 6:22-23).

While the wording of the KJV might be somewhat unfamiliar to us, the meaning of what Jesus said is not that difficult to understand. Our eyes give our physical bodies the ability to perceive our surroundings and act accordingly. If our eyes are “single”, that is they are able to see clearly and thus our perception is not distorted, then our response to what we see will be measured and appropriate. If, however, our eyes are “evil”, or in other words they are diseased or damaged in some way, then we will not be able to see clearly and our response will be determined by information we have perceived incorrectly. Thus our response may be something other than what is needed. For example, if our eyes lead us to believe the ground is level when it is actually uneven, we are very likely to misstep and may possibly wind up injuring ourselves.

The spiritual application of this lesson is easily grasped when the context is taken into consideration. Jesus had been teaching them not to be concerned with what men thought about their devotion to God (Matt. 6:16-18) and also about the importance of focusing on laying up treasures in heaven and not on the earth (Matt. 6:19-20). If these types of things were the things that concerned them the most, then truly they would have their hearts set on them (Matt. 16:21) and would fail to live a pure and holy life that would insure their soul's salvation in Heaven.

To drive the point home with His audience, He tells them plainly, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye can-

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Treasure in Heaven are Permanent

This world will not last forever, but heaven will. This world will, one day, be destroyed. Additionally, every thing in this world will “be dissolved” (2 Peter 3:11). This should be a powerful reminder that this world is not our home.

Conversely, heaven lasts forever (Matthew 25:46), and treasures that we have laid up in heaven will be the only permanent ones we will have. It is sober to think on this biblical reality: one day, the world will end and all that everyone owns will be destroyed. In that day, the only thing of real value will be the relationship that we have cultivated with Christ, the Savior. Many will learn too late that they have focused their attention on things that really do not matter. Only those who live for God will have a “house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1).

Treasures in Heaven are Preferred

If it were possible for someone to gain the whole world, he or she really would not own much at all because this world is ending. Jesus tells of one who would try to gain the whole world while losing his own soul (Matthew 16:26). Jesus concludes that there is no profit for one who loses his soul.

Even if the whole world rejects us, we should prefer the blessings that God gives. His ways are best, and treasures in heaven are better than everything this world has to offer.

LIVING A PURE AND HOLY LIFE

Matthew 6:22-24

David Williams

Cataracts are a common eye problem among the elderly. This eye condition results in an inability to see well at night, double vision, blurry vision, and trouble perceiving depth of color. Cataracts usually develop slowly and so the symptoms that manifest themselves are often not immediately recognized as being the result of their development.

Myopia, also known as nearsightedness, is another eye disorder that afflicts large numbers of people. A person with myopia has fine vision up close, but is unable to focus clearly on things that are far away. Hyper-

everything in itself is not a virtue (1 Corinthians 13:1-3), it is the giving coupled with the love for and trust in God that is admirable. The question we need to ask ourselves is have we ever even given so much that it made us uncomfortable or inconvenienced? Most likely not, because we tend to give sparingly from our abundance.

The pattern for giving we find in the New Testament includes doing whatever is necessary to be able to give. Immediately after becoming Christians, several needs arose in the church at Jerusalem. How did these babes in Christ respond? *“And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need”* (Acts 2:2:44-45). *“And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common...neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need”* (Acts 4:32-35).

If we are willing to be honest with ourselves we will admit that **likely every single member** in our congregations has borrowed money or used credit cards to pay for a house, car, education, vacation or personal purchase, while at the same time **it is likely that not one single member** in our congregation has borrowed money or used credit cards to give to a spiritual cause (children’s home, mission work, benevolence effort, etc) or to the church in general.

There is one area where we have certainly succeeded in restoring the New Testament pattern for giving. *“Take heed that ye **do not your alms before men, to be seen of them:** otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: **That thine alms may be in secret:** and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly”* (Matthew 6:1-4). We do not publicize our giving. Sadly the reason isn’t because we are humble, but likely because we are embarrassed for anyone to know how little we are giving. Having passed the collection plates for years and been involved in the counting of the contribution, it is almost comical how

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secretive brethren become when the plate is passed. You would think two spies were passing national secrets the way we don't make eye contact and create distractions while passing to the next person. The slight of hand that some brethren use would make a magician jealous. I have seen countless one dollar bills folded and twisted like origami in an attempt to disguise how little is being contributed. So many are worried if there will be anything left in Social Security when it comes time for them to retire, when we should be worried if we have anything laid up in heaven when we retire from this life (Matthew 6:20).

LIVING IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD: PRAYER LIFE

Matthew 6:5-15

Patrick Morrison

One of the greatest privileges we enjoy as children of God is the assurance of the Father's continual presence with us. He dwells with us (2 Corinthians 6:16). He has promised never to leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Jesus states that he will abide in us as we abide in him by remaining in his word (John 15:4, 7). One of my favorite hymns that we often sing is, "Be with Me, Lord," by brother L.O. Sanderson. The third stanza of that song states, "Be with me, Lord! No other gift or blessing thou couldst bestow could with this one compare—A constant sense of thy abiding presence, where're I am, to feel that thou art near." David took comfort in knowing that Jehovah was always near: "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me" (Psalm 139:7-10). What an awesome blessing it is to know that God is ever present with us! Though our sins separated us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2), Christ died to reconcile us to the Almighty (Romans 5:10). By the blood of Jesus fellowship has been restored (1 John 1:7). We have been granted the privilege of living in the presence of God each day, so that one day we may live in His presence eternally!

One way to ensure the continual presence of God in our lives is to communicate with Him regularly. Our heavenly Father allows us to come into His presence and make known our wants and petitions (Philippians 4:6). We can cast all our cares upon Him, for He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). As a loving Father, God desires that we speak to Him often. Com-

Treasures in Heaven

Matthew 6:19-21

Dustin Forthun

Actual hidden treasure may exist on Oak Island (off the western shore of Nova Scotia, Canada). In 1795, three boys believed they would find rumored treasure left by pirates and spent a day digging on Oak Island before ending their search. Though they found no real treasure, what they did discover soon became the talk of the town. The "money pit" as it is now called seems specially engineered to prevent careless searchers from being able to reach its contents. Many attempts have been made to exhume it but all have resulted in failure.

True believers think that great treasure may be in the money pit. Some even suggest that it may hold the Ark of the Covenant. Many others are unconvinced that it holds anything of value. For now, the government of Canada seems content to suspend any real excavation attempt and leave the site as a tourist attraction. One thing we can know for sure is this: nothing in the money pit (or any where else on earth) is able to be compared to treasures in heaven.

Treasures in Heaven are Precious

Jesus compares earthly treasures to heavenly treasures in Matthew 6:19-20, and He notes that heavenly treasures are exempt from rust, corruption, and decay. Everything on this earth breaks down. Gold and silver tarnish; expensive paintings and works of art fade; electronics become obsolete, and most things of value depreciate.

While such loss is a painful reality of this world, Christians are promised treasures that are incorruptible, undefiled, and that will not fade away (1 Peter. 1:4). What God promises is truly precious. While most would consider gold and silver to be "precious metals," Peter calls silver and gold "corruptible things" (1Peter 1:18). In 1 Corinthians 9:25, Paul uses the same key word (*fhartos*) to describe the leafy crowns that athletes would receive. These are portrayed as far less glorious than the ones Christians strive to gain. Standing opposite to silver and gold is the "precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter. 1:19). Only this gives true treasure!

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“Why am I fasting?” Is it to draw closer to God, strengthening oneself spiritually? Or, is it to be applauded by men? The latter motivation will result in a person’s “conveniently” (or even blatantly) letting it be known to others that he is fasting.

Hypocrisy is deliberate deception. It involves a person’s portrayal of one attitude, all the while possessing another attitude (or motive) in the heart. Hypocrisy results when one fasts in order to appear “spiritual” before men. He may actually abstain from food, but his fast is not “unto” God. His heart is actually very worldly, seeking the commendation of men. Jesus warned the Pharisees, “Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God,” (Luke 16:15).

The REWARD for Fasting. In connection with fasting, there are two types of rewards mentioned in the present text. The first type regards ostentatious, hypocritical fasting (Matt. 6:16). Those who fast, seeking the praise of men, need not expect any reward from God. Their only reward will be the acclaim received from fellow-man. This is a hollow “blessing,” indeed, in contrast to the good gifts that only God gives (cf. James 1:17). The admiration of men is meaningless in light of eternity, not to mention its fickle, fleeting nature here on earth!

The other type of reward should be that sought by all of God’s children. It is God’s blessing (Matt. 6:18), and it is not dependent on one’s actions being publicly known. God sees all—even those things done in secret (Prov. 15:3; Heb. 4:13). He will surely reward faithful devotion to Him, even though the nature of such reward might not be known with certainty. The King James Version supplies the word “openly,” suggesting that God’s reward will be clearly seen by others. However, the manuscript evidence for “openly” is lacking, both here and in Matthew 6:4, 6. For this reason the word is omitted from virtually all modern versions. Jesus taught the *certainty* of God’s reward, not necessarily the *nature* of that reward. The faithful disciple is content with this, knowing that God is able to bless in more ways than one can count!

munication is vital in order to maintain a committed relationship. Sadly, some seek to maintain only the façade of fellowship with God. Self-righteousness has caused many to be hypocritical regarding their relationship to the Father. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed man’s tendency to become self-righteous, showing how it manifests itself in every aspect of our lives. He shows us how to live a righteous, godly life in all sincerity before God and the world. The teachings of Jesus in this great sermon address the importance of regular, unpretentious, heart-felt communication with our heavenly Father. He teaches us what prayer should not be: “And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward” (Matthew 6:5). Prayer is not an exercise in showmanship. When man believes himself to be the audience of prayer then he has lost sight of the privilege of communicating with God. Prayer is not a public display of righteousness. Rather, it is a private lifeline to the throne of Jehovah God: “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matthew 6:6). While it is absolutely imperative that we live a righteous life before the world, the faithful child of God will do so in order to draw attention to his Father, not himself. Again, Jesus teaches us what prayer should not be: “But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking” (Matthew 6:7). Prayer does not somehow become more certain to reach the ears of God based upon the verbosity of the petitioner, nor is a prayer more certain to be answered simply by repeating trite expressions time and time again. Some seem to think that a prayer must be eternal to be effective, but Jesus teaches us otherwise. Prayer is not intended to inform God, for He knows our needs before we even ask (Matthew 6:8).

As all great teachers do, Jesus then gives an example of acceptable, sincere, heart-felt prayer in less than seventy words: “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matthew 6:9-13). This model prayer teaches us how we should approach God as we communicate with Him in prayer. We are taught to pray that His will might be done above our own, even as we make known our wants and petitions. Jesus teaches us the importance of regular prayer, as we pray for the daily pro-

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visions of a benevolent Father. We are instructed as to the importance of maintaining a contrite, humble heart that we might not fall prey to self-righteousness. All of this and so much more is conveyed in this concise, yet powerful, prayer.

If we desire to live in the presence of God, then we must live in the practice of prayer. We cannot stray from this source of strength and encouragement and expect to defeat the onslaughts of the evil one. A relationship wherein is no communication is no relationship at all. May we ever be a people who continue instant in prayer (Colossians 4:2), ready to go before the throne of God at any time to pour out our gratitude as we make our requests known unto Him (Philippians 4:6).

INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING FASTING

Matthew 6:16-18

Cliff Goodwin

The Sermon on the Mount stands in Biblical history as one of the greatest sermons ever preached. And why not? It was delivered personally by the Son of God, of Whom it was said following that sermon, “He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (cf. Matt. 7:29). Jesus addressed spiritual matters pertaining to His coming kingdom, as well as matters pertaining to personal piety. It is the latter with which this article is concerned.

In the heart of His masterful sermon, Jesus specifically addressed three areas of religious devotion common to Jews in that day. First, He treated the matter of alms-giving (Matt. 6:1-4). Alms-giving was a charitable act of benevolence in which one gave to those who were in need. Still today the church is to be mindful of and helpful to the poor (cf. Gal. 2:10). Second, Jesus taught concerning prayer (Matt. 6:5-15). This was the lengthiest of the three discussions, including what is commonly referred to as the “model prayer.” Third, the Lord addressed the matter of fasting (Matt. 6:16-18), and His teaching in this area serves as the subject of this present piece. Suffice it now to point out, that in all three religious devotions, Jesus stressed the importance of sincerity and secrecy (Matt. 6:4, 6, 18). He taught that one should carry out all three of these spiritual exercises in sincerity, not pretentiousness. It was not that one should nec-

essarily mind whether his pious acts were known by others, but that he should do not such acts *in order for them to be known of others*. Thus, His disciples are taught to seek secrecy as opposed to publicity.

The REASON for Fasting. As a spiritual discipline, Biblical fasting is carried out in order for one to draw closer unto God. This differentiates fasting from a diet and even from a hunger strike. Diets are practiced for physical/medical purposes, and hunger strikes are observed for political purposes. Fasting has a spiritual purpose. Zechariah, the inspired prophet, pointed out that fasting must be done “unto” God, not anyone else (Zech. 7:5). That is, fasting is carried out with regard to God—in order to honor God and draw closer to Him. Any reason for fasting that falls short of strengthening one’s personal relationship with God and seeking His help or blessings in one’s life, robs the exercise of its spiritual import and benefit.

How can there be spiritual benefit in abstaining from food? This seems to be the natural question from the modern mind. There are a number of ways fasting can be spiritually beneficial. One, fasting is a demonstration and practical reminder that there are things in life more important than eating. The Bible supplies a number of such examples: the approach of momentous events (Dan. 9:1-3); instances of penitence and reform (Jonah 3:5ff); and the preparation for great works (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23), to name a few. Two, fasting can be an effective tool in learning self-control, or temperance (cf. Acts 24:25; Gal. 5:22-23). The Bible clearly teaches that the belly is to be one’s servant, not one’s master (cf. 1 Cor. 6:12-13; Php. 3:19). Three, fasting provides a very tangible way for one to emphasize the spiritual over the physical. As one abstains from food, he should devote himself actively to prayer and to meditating on God’s word. In this way, fasting actually becomes *feasting* (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4).

The RETICENCE of Fasting. As noted earlier, Jesus emphasized secrecy regarding the spiritual devotions discussed in the former portion of Matthew 6. Such secrecy is never a matter of *deception*, but rather of *discretion*. Reticence is a good word to describe such privacy. A fasting person should be reserved and “close-mouthed” regarding his fast. Jesus taught that fasting, along with prayer and alms-giving, should be personal and sincere. The opposite attitude would be showy and ostentatious. One needs to ask himself,