

Invitation to the Sermon on the Mount Lifestyle - Pt. 2

Jim Hall - July 2010

Foundations that Cannot Be Shaken

A) In part 1 we looked at the question of 'Is the future friendly?'

i) Jesus spoke about his 2nd coming and calls us to be 'faithful and wise servants' (Matt. 24:44-47) as we eagerly anticipate the return of our Lord

ii) In order to be considered to be those 'wise and faithful' ones we must live out the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7)

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." -Matt. 7:24-27

B) Using the biblical analogy of the 'garden of our heart' (Song of Songs 4:1) Jesus teaches us that we must diligently work to remove 6 'weeds' or toxins that choke the spiritual life from our heart (Matt. 5:21-48).

C) Today in part 2 we will examine the second part of the 'garden analogy': the 5 practices that we must diligently work to include in our lives in order to 'water' or nourish our hearts. These five areas are found in Matt. 6

The Pathway to Having our Heart Set Free

A) Many Christians live with a paradigm that distinguishes loving God from loving God's ways. This is a faulty paradigm that is unbiblical and destructive to our spiritual lives. Many people are familiar with Jn. 14:15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command." Practically we love God and we try to tolerate what we feel are his 'boring' commands.

B) The reality is that there is no separation between loving God and loving his commands. His ways are an expression of who God is.

C) The high vision of Psalm 119:

i) "My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times." (v. 20)

ii) "Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors." (v. 24)

iii) "I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free." (v. 32)

D) This paradigm shift is critical as we examine the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and specifically at the five practices that 'water the garden of our heart'. The promise to us is that if we will 'run in the path' of these practices, God will 'set our heart free'!

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Watering the Garden: Practices that Set the Heart Free

A) These are not activities that are reserved for the 'super Christians' or the 'mature believers' or even for the elders of the church. This is Christianity 101. The teaching of the entire sermon on the mount is what ALL believers are called to.

B) These are commands of the Lord Jesus; they are not optional for us. Each of these areas reveal the Lord's heart and are foundational to how God runs His Kingdom, not only in this age but in the age to come. The teaching in the sermon on the mount will never become obsolete!

C) Each of these five areas calls us to embrace an expression of voluntary weakness. Jesus said to Paul "my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). As we choose to embrace these aspects of weakness in God's 'upside down kingdom' we encounter the supernatural power of God that can liberate our hearts from bondage.

D) Jesus gives five key areas that we must practice and nurture in our lives:

Giving: Matt. 6:1-4

- Generosity is at the center of all of God's ways. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son..." (Jn. 3:16)
- The opposite of generous is 'stingy'.
- Giving is far more than a good idea. Giving has enormous spiritual impact on us. While giving will unlock your heart, being stingy will harden and lock your heart in powerful ways.
- Giving is a form of weakness because we are choosing to live on less. Less money, less time, less space.
- There are important links between giving and Jesus' teaching on 'believing' in v. 25-34. Worry and fear about whether we will have enough provision almost always manifests itself in us drawing back in the area of giving.
- We must respond to worry and fear of lack by acting in the 'opposite spirit': practice giving and generosity.
- One of Jesus key points here about giving (and prayer and fasting) is the motivation of the heart. Without the proper motivation, the very practice that is designed to liberate the heart will lead to further bondage in our hearts.

Praying: Matt. 6:5-15

- Jesus' primary point in v. 5-8 is not about the location or duration of our prayers but the motivation from which they flow.
- Prayer is a form of weakness in two main ways: it is a declaration of our need for help. It is also voluntary weakness because it takes so much time
- The 'Lord's prayer' is a tremendously powerful prayer. It also serves as a 'table of contents' or 'topics' or 'themes' for our prayer life.

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- v. 14-15 speak on the topic of forgiveness. We must never underestimate the impact of forgiveness on our hearts, both to soften it (as we forgive) but also to harden it (when we fail to forgive).

Fasting: Matt. 6:16-18

- Of all the five areas Jesus addresses, the practice of fasting is most commonly thought of as being only for 'radical' Christians. Nothing could be further from the truth!
- Fasting (related to food) was a regular practice by the disciples of John the Baptist, and Jesus spoke numerous times about the importance of this spiritual discipline.
- Jesus understood fasting to be a 'normative' practice, not an extreme practice to be used occasionally in dire situations.
- Fasting is an obvious form of voluntary weakness. We simply do not have the physical energy when we are fasting.

Longing: Matt. 6:19-24

- What do we long for? What do we desire most? The answer has great impact on how we spend our time. Jesus really is speaking to the issue of time management in these verses. What are we investing our lives in?
- In saying that the 'eye is the lamp of the body' Jesus is speaking about the mindset or focus of our entire lives. It is far more than whether we look at sinful things.
- In the overall context of Matt. 6 Jesus calls us to have a singular vision that is focused on the eternal rather than the temporal.
- This dynamic focus requires tremendous energy to maintain. In living this way we are embracing a form of weakness because our focus and energy is not devoted toward temporal gain: money, power, fame etc.

Believing: Matt. 6:25-34

- When we live lives of voluntary weakness in these areas, we inevitably come to wrestle with the fears of the potential consequences. When we relinquish control of our lives by focusing on the eternal realm rather than the temporal, we come face to face with fears of our existing temporal needs (food, shelter, clothing etc.)
- Jesus reveals that these fears are rooted in issues of faith and belief.
- Again Jesus calls us to courageously focus the entirety of our lives on the eternal Kingdom of God and to boldly believe that God will actively respond to such a life focus by providing for our temporal needs.

Walking in Freedom: Practical Steps

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