**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 1-30-2022
The Three Pillars**

I am thankful to the Lord for His many blessings in my life. Far too many blessings than I could ever count. Thankful for my family. Thankful for church family. Thankful for my health. But most importantly, thankful for Jesus and His grace. Thankful for all that He did for me and for you and for everyone. God is so very good. Amen.

One of the blessings on my journey was the privilege I had of working for many years in my parent’s business, Eastern Caisson.

It was a blessing in many ways. Not only was I able to work with and spend significant time with my Dad and Brother, but I got to meet and interact with lots of people as well. It was an opportunity to be salt and light, as not everyone was a believer.

And I am ever grateful for the generosity of my parents in allowing me to continue to work at Eastern Caisson with very flexible hours while I was attending seminary and following the Lord’s leading in my life as I felt God calling me to become a pastor.

Eastern Caisson is a foundation drilling business. This was fitting for me, as my foundations in the faith were strengthened during my time at Eastern.

When it comes to structures, without a strong foundation, a structure is unstable and in danger of crumbling. So, foundations are very important.

But this isn’t true just with physical structures. Foundations are even more critical when it comes to our walk with Christ.

Today, as we continue on our journey through Jesus’ amazing Sermon on the Mount, we find Jesus speaking about three critical foundations to a godly life. In fact, the Jewish people believed that these practices were the most critical for someone to live a devoted life to God.

These three practices or foundations are giving (particularly almsgiving to the poor), praying, and finally fasting.

Jesus finds these foundations to be very important as well, for they are given the prominent centerpiece place right at the heart of Jesus’ entire Sermon.

Let’s see what Jesus has to say regarding each of these important foundations. We find this in Matthew 6:1-18

**1 “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.**

**2“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 3But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.**

**5“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.**

**9“This, then, is how you should pray:**

**“‘Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
10your kingdom come,
your will be done,
    on earth as it is in heaven.
11Give us today our daily bread.
12And forgive us our debts,
    as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13And lead us not into temptation,[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+6%3A1-18&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23296a)**]
    but deliver us from the evil one.[**[**b**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+6%3A1-18&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23296b)**]’**

**14For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.**

**16“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 17But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.**

In these words of Jesus, you probably noticed a theme. Jesus gives a warning to not practice these godly things in order to impress others.

**The word that keeps coming up is hypocrite**. The word hypocrite literally means play actor. The Jewish people were familiar with actors and plays, for the Romans had their theatres scattered throughout their empire. And while Jesus does not say that there is anything wrong with being an actor in and of itself, Jesus is extremely clear that one’s spiritual walk should never be a performance. It should never be about impressing others.

And in this passage Jesus gives examples of hypocrisy in each of these 3 foundations.

First, Jesus addresses giving to the needy. He tells His audience to not announce their giving with trumpets.

You can see Jesus’ sense of humor coming through clearly here. What can be more attention getting than having a trumpet sounded.

Jesus is saying that when the hypocrites give to the poor, they are looking for applause. *The Pharisees, sadly, were largely focused on looking good and godly to others.* Their reputation, their own honor, that was often their focus. It’s as if they were saying “Look at me! Look at what I’m doing!”

And Jesus says that these hypocrites have received their reward in full. That reward is the praise of people.

But Jesus tells this crowd, “**when you give, don’t left your left hand know what your right hand is doing**.” In order words, do not do it to look good or impress people. Do it secretly. Do not make a big deal out of it.

And although people may not see it, there is One who sees all. Almighty God. And Jesus is telling them that when they give in this way, God will reward them.

And we shouldn’t think of reward in human terms, like they’ll get more money from God if they do this. The Lord will reward them by spiritual blessings, by eternal blessings. And yes, God may choose to entrust them with more financial resources to steward well also. God is not limited on how He chooses to bless them.

Jesus then, in the centermost part of the Sermon on the Mount, addresses arguably the most important foundation of godliness in the mind of the Jews – prayer.

And again, Jesus warns His followers to not pray like the hypocrites, who love to be seen and to pray lengthy prayers before others.

Instead, prayer is never to be done as an act or a performance. Jesus is not telling them that they should never pray in public, but He is reminding them that prayer is never to be a performance.

People’s flowery prayers do not impress God. What blesses and honors our great God are humble and sincere prayers.

On that note, please never disqualify yourself, thinking that your prayers are not fancy or eloquent enough. If our hearts are right, our prayers bless God.

And then we find the Lord’s Prayer here. This model prayer is very God-focused. The whole first section of it is all about acknowledging God, not only as our Father, but also praying in a way that honors God’s Name and advances His Kingdom and seeks His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And after this, the prayer is all about teaching God’s people to look to God for His help in their needs, including the need to forgive others who sin against them.

Jesus in all of this is telling His hearers that their prayers should never be self-exalting, but action of humility before our great God.

And finally, Jesus speaks about fasting. The hypocrites here would fast, but they would let everybody know that they were fasting by the way that they dress and kept themselves.

Again, the hypocrites might do these actions, but it is really all an act, a performance, in order to impress people.

Jesus tells this crowd that when they fast, do not let others know it. But again, like with almsgiving and prayer, their Heavenly Father will see them and He will reward them.

*Friends, as we seek to grasp this very importance section of Jesus’ unequaled Sermon, what are we to make of it for our lives today? What is the major takeaway?*

**And I believe that it is this**. Jesus expects His followers to practice each of these godly acts (and others), but for them to never be an act or a performance to try to impress people.

You may have noticed that in regards to all three of these godly actions, Jesus says “when” rather than “if.”

But clearly, how we practice these things makes all the difference. Do we do them as expressions of worship and devotion to God or to receive praise from others?

 And this teaching of our Lord can be expanded to include other godly things.

**Going to church** – Is to celebrate and worship God or to keep up appearances?

**Studying the Bible** – is it to know the mind and heart of God in a deeper way to strengthen our relationship with Him or is it to try to stump people with our Bible knowledge?

Friends, there are opportunities that God gives to each of us to express our devotion to Him, certainly including these 3 godly actions Jesus addresses here.

But more important than our actions are the motives behind those actions.

So sisters and brothers, my prayer for all of us today is that we ask the Holy Spirit to help us to not only pursue godly actions, but to have pure motives as we do them – motives that are all about the glory of God and never our own glory.

Let us pray…

Resources:

[www.Biblegateway.com](http://www.Biblegateway.com)

Leon Morris – Matthew Commentary

D.A. Carson – Matthew Commentary Chapters 1-12

Doug Buckwalter – notes on prayer