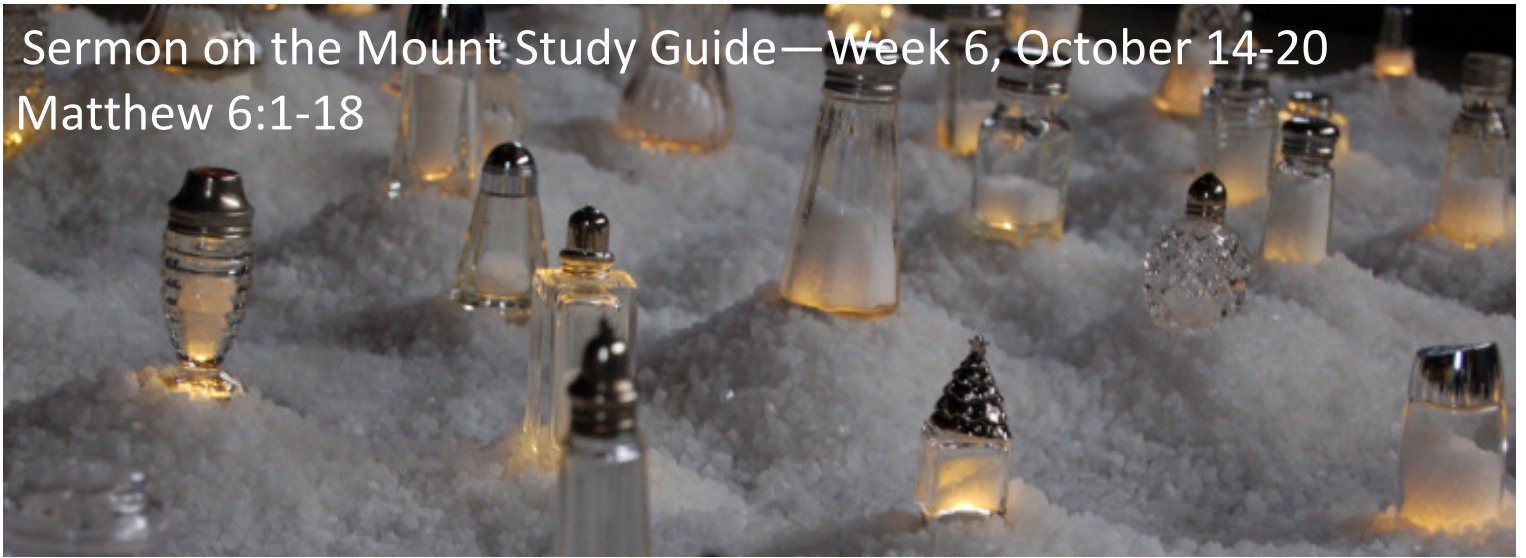


Sermon on the Mount Study Guide—Week 6, October 14-20

Matthew 6:1-18



- I. “Now, when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.” (Matthew 5:1-2)
- II. Opening prayer for Illumination
- III. Read Matthew 6:1-18
- IV. Stott Study Guide: pp. 31-36
- V. *The Divine Conspiracy*, pp. 187-188 (summary section), 188-202 (Matt. 6:1-8, 16-18), 253-269 (Matt. 6:9-15):

As we have already discussed throughout our study of Matthew 5, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus provides his followers with teachings about how to best become as he was. He teaches people how to find true inner goodness by living as fully as they can into the Kingdom of God. Having provided this framework in the first part of the Sermon, in Matthew 6, Jesus turns his attention to two major areas that might hinder people in that growth process and keep them from participating fully in God’s Kingdom reality: the desire for the approval of others and the desire to secure oneself through material wealth.

This week’s study focuses on the first misplaced desire. Regarding the temptation to seek the approval from others in our lives (especially in our Christian devotion), Dallas Willard writes, “Recall that Jesus often teaches against a background practice that is wrong.... The background practices presupposed in Matt. 6:1-18 are, obviously, doing good deeds, praying, and fasting to be seen” (202).

He continues, “Whatever our position in life, if our lives and works are to be of the kingdom of God, we must not have human approval as a primary or even major aim. We must lovingly allow people to think whatever they will. We may, if it seems right, occasionally, try to help them understand us and appreciate what we are doing. That could be an act of love. But in any case we can only serve them by serving the Lord only” (202).

Now, again, the point here is a whole-life transformation. As Willard states, “we must never forget that Jesus points *beyond* action to the source of action in character. This is a general principle that governs all that he says. The kind of people who have been so transformed by their daily walk with God that good deeds naturally flow from their character are precisely the kind of people whose left hand would not notice what their right hand is doing...” (192).

This brings us back to the Jesus’ purpose in the Sermon on the Mount. As Willard reiterates numerous times, Jesus is not here developing a new, legalistic moral code or list of approved actions. Instead, he’s seeking to develop people who, as members of his Father’s kingdom, can truly serve God as whole-heartedly as possible, with that and that alone as their constant aim in all that they do.

Please read the opening five paragraphs on pp. 187-188 in *The Divine Conspiracy* for a summary of the Sermon so far and an introduction to this and next weeks’ studies.

VI. Questions of 1st Importance:

1. Questions for the Text

- i. What “reward” is Jesus talking about in verses 4 and 6? Doesn’t this sound like works-righteousness? What might Jesus be saying in these verses?
- ii. In verse 7, Jesus says, “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.” What does this verse tell us about what prayer is? What is prayer supposed to be like?
- iii. Verse 8 states that God already knows what we need before we ask him. Why then should we still pray? What does prayer do for our relationship with God?
- iv. How is the “Lord’s Prayer,” in verses 9-13, a foundation for our prayer lives?
- v. What do verses 14 and 15 mean when they say that we will only be forgiven if we love others? What does this say about how God’s grace manifests itself in our lives?

2. Questions for the World

- i. On paper, the whole idea of keeping our “acts of righteousness” to ourselves seems like a very good idea. But is this easy to actually do? Why or why not? In what situations are we most tempted to tell others about the good that we do?
- ii. Who have we known who often cared for other people and lived a life close to God but led a good example of not doing such things “in front of others”?
- iii. As we’ve seen before, Willard argues that habits of practicing our Christian devotion in private lead us to the Spiritual Disciplines. What Spiritual Disciplines do we regularly practice and why? How do they help us cultivate the “inner goodness” that Jesus is after in our lives? How have we felt about the suggested disciplines in this study? Have they been helpful? Why or why not?

VII. Questions of 2nd Importance:

1. Questions for the Text

- i. How does praying, fasting, and giving in secret help move us past the righteousness of the Pharisees and teachers of the law? Is the order of the Sermon on the Mount helpful in understanding Jesus’ words in Matthew 6: 1-18?
- ii. What do the different lines of the Lord’s Prayer mean? See Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 118-129 or *The Divine Conspiracy* pp. 255-269.

2. Questions for the World

- i. How often do we pray the Lord’s Prayer? What does it mean to us? Do we appreciate it? Why or why not?
- ii. Do we feel a connection between forgiving other people and our own forgiveness? What does our resistance to forgiving others do to our relationship with God?

VIII. If so desired, watch Monday’s chapel on this week’s text at:

IX. Recommended Spiritual Discipline for this week: Solitude/Fasting