Deeper Discoveries
Sermon on the Mount

Lesson 10: Matthew 6:1–8; 16–18

Literary Design

The Lord's Prayer

We have reached the middle of Jesus' sermon, so it's a good time to look at the underlying literary design of Matthew's account. Although this week's lesson doesn't cover it, notice that the Lord's Prayer is centered between giving and fasting. In fact, Pastor Mark pointed out in his sermon last month that it is the center of the Sermon on the Mount. The center is often the most important point of the text; do you think that's the case here? Here is the design (called a *chiasm*—Google it to learn more). The key is that A1 matches A2, B1 matches B2, etc., all the way to the center that stands alone. The story takes a path to its destination, the center, then takes the same path back to the beginning:

A1. Jesus heals people (4:23–25)
- B1. Jesus' response to the crowds: he goes up a mountain and teaches (5:1–2)
  - C1. Introduction: What true disciples *are*: blessed, salt, light, persecuted like Jesus (5:3–16)
    - D1. The entire OT, "the Law and the Prophets," is fulfilled in, by, and through Jesus (5:17–20)
      - E1. Examples of righteousness: murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, love (5:21–48)
        - F1. Display righteousness secretly before God in giving (6:1–6)
          - G1. Pray, but not with empty or repetitious words (6:7–8)
            - H. The Lord's Prayer: true disciples pray with transformed hearts (6:9–13)
          - G2. Pray, but as a forgiving and forgiven sinner (6:14–15)
        - F2. Display righteousness secretly before God in fasting (6:16–18)
      - E2. Examples of righteousness: possessions, judging, asking (6:19–7:11)
    - D2. The entire OT, "the Law and the Prophets," is summed up by The Golden Rule (7:12)
  - C2. Conclusion: How true disciples *differ* from false ones, explained through parables (7:13–27)
- B2. The crowd's response to Jesus: they are astonished (7:21–8:1a)

A2. Jesus heals people (8:1b–9:34)

Why this design? Is it just literary art for its own sake, or secret decoder-ring stuff? May it never be! The Sermon on the Mount is indeed artful and beautiful, but its literary art serves an important purpose. Daniel Doriani explains one purpose: Matthew frames the Sermon to make a theological claim about Jesus:

> Matthew invites his readers to see the *demands* of Christ in light of the *gifts* of Christ. Jesus heals his people (4:23–25), then teaches them (5:1–7:29), and then heals them again (8:1–9:34). His teaching carries the same authority as his "instruction" of nature because he speaks with authority in both cases. The people marvel at the authority of Jesus' words as he teaches (7:29), and they also marvel at the authority of his words when he heals. Jesus commands people, commands nature, and he expects both to obey. [1]

You don't need to know this pattern to ponder the Sermon on the Mount well, or to understand the importance of the Lord's Prayer. But hopefully, now that you see the design, you will be drawn to love Scripture even more for its literary genius, and give praise to the Father who hears us, the Son who teaches us, and the Spirit who, through Matthew, recorded this for us in such a beautiful way.

[1] Daniel M. Doriani, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Character of a Disciple* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 7–8. Edited. Credit to the late Swiss theologian Ulrich Luz (1938–2019) for proposing this structure.

Old Testament Connections and Themes

Jesus' warnings concerning the standard (and expected) Jewish practices of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting follow a repeated pattern: he condemns the hypocritical approach (public performance), then prescribes the authentic alternative—practicing privately so that "your Father who sees in secret will reward you." The central claim: true piety operates from inner conviction directed toward God, not outward display directed toward others. Such warnings are not new; the OT already speaks of hindrances to prayer that make an answer difficult or even impossible to obtain, which includes disobedience (Deut 1:43–45; Isa 1:15–17; 59:1–2), lovelessness toward others (Isa 58:3–10), and injustice (Mic 3:1–4). [1] The LORD rebukes the people in Isaiah for hypocritical fasting: "Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high" (Isa 58:4). And Moses warns of the sin of "unworthy thoughts" and "a grudging heart" when giving to the poor (Deut 15:7–11). "God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble" (James 4:6, from Prov 3:34)

Jesus speaks like an Old Testament prophet; in fact, he speaks as the LORD spoke, because Jesus *is* the Lord, and the message here is the same: "The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:7).

[1] Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of NT Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 338.

Commentary (St. Augustine, in 410 A.D. – a "blast from the past") – Does Jesus Contradict Himself?

SERMON 54: On what is written in the gospel of Matthew 5:16: "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven," versus that of Matthew 6:1: "Take care not to perform your righteousness before men, to be seen by them." [In this sermon, Augustine shows how Scripture interprets Scripture to resolve apparent difficulties; here, should good works: seen or unseen?]

Confessions and opposites (What is the dilemma?)
1. Many people, dearly beloved, are constantly troubled because after our Lord Jesus Christ had said, in the Sermon on the Mount, "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven," he went on to say later on, "Take care not to perform your righteousness before men, to be seen by them." Someone not good at understanding things, and yet eager all the same to obey commandments, is disturbed and torn between contraries and opposites. … So what is the wobbly soul to do? You see, if he places his good works in the light to be noticed by other people, to carry out the command, "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven," he will think himself guilty of acting against the command that says, "Take care not to perform your righteousness before men, to be seen by them." But if he fears this and hides the good things he does, he will conclude that he is not serving the one who said, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works."

The example of Paul (What is the solution to the dilemma?)
2. However, anyone who understands the matter correctly *can* fulfill both requirements, faithfully serving the all-embracing Master. … Listen to Paul, the servant of Jesus Christ, called an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, both doing and teaching each of these things. Notice how his light shines before others, so they may see his good works. "We commend ourselves," he says, "to everybody's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor 4:2); and again, "We aim at good things, not only before God, but also before men" (2 Cor 8:21); and again, "Please everyone in everything, just as I too please everyone in everything" (1 Cor 10:33).

Notice, next, how he takes care not to perform his righteousness before other people to be seen by them; but let each one, he says, "test his own work, and then he will have glory in himself and not in another" (Gal 6:4); and again, "For this is our glory, the testimony of our conscience" (2 Cor 1:12); and the plainest of the lot of them, "If I were still pleasing men," he says, "I would not be Christ's servant" (Gal 1:10). [1]

[1] Saint Augustine, *Sermons 51–94 on the New Testament*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. III, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2009), 87–88. Edited with updated language.