

# Fasting and Giving with Jesus

Thomas Robinson, *Seeing Life Through Jesus' Eyes* 3, January. 15, 2012

Matthew 6:1-4, 16-26

<sup>1</sup> “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of **righteousness**’ in front of others, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no **reward** from your **Father in heaven**.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. Then your **Father**, who sees what is done in secret, will **reward you** (give back to you).

<sup>16</sup> **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.

<sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> so 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**.

<sup>19</sup> Do not **store up** for yourselves **treasures on earth**, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves **treasures in heaven**, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

<sup>22</sup> **The eye is the lamp of the body.** If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. <sup>23</sup> But if your eyes are unhealthy (evil), your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

<sup>24</sup> **No one can serve two masters.** Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. **You cannot serve both God and money.**”

Matthew 25:35-36

<sup>35</sup> For **I was hungry and you gave me food**, I was **thirsty** and you **gave me drink**, I was a **stranger** and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was **naked** and you clothed me, I was **sick** and you visited me, I was in **prison** and you came to me.”

Matthew 5:16

<sup>16</sup> In the same way, **let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.**

Isaiah 58:5-8

<sup>5</sup> “Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself?  
Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread **sackcloth and ashes** under him?  
Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD?

<sup>6</sup> Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the **bonds of wickedness**,  
to undo the straps of the **yoke**, to **let the oppressed go free**, and to break every yoke?

<sup>7</sup> Is it not to **share your bread with the hungry** and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

<sup>8</sup> Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily;  
your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.”

## **Authentic Engagement with God**

We began with Jesus' call to "Seek first God's kingdom..." (6:33). Then turned to Jesus' teaching about prayer as engagement with God, seen especially in the "Lord's Prayer." In all this Jesus calls us continually to see / know / trust the reality and presence of God in every aspect of life. God is not distant but active everywhere in his creation. He does not overpower us with his glory and might, but that glory is visible when we learn to look. Jesus saw so much inauthentic religion. A demanding piety and elaborate temple practice that worked on its own, without a real relationship to God. Substitute gods for God. Jesus insists that you can't serve two masters. The problem is our blindness to God (6:22-3). God is hidden in plain sight. If we learn to see Him, reality floods our life with light. If we remain blind to him, we serve little godlings. Distortion/darkness fills us.

## **Act and Audience – Public and Secret**

Jesus says it takes practice. The things and people we see screen out God unless we actively practice awareness of God. He urges a continual awareness of the danger. It is easy for religious motives to become misdirected. Righteousness becomes aimed at public praise that seems large and important. In fact it becomes a small closed circle without God. The danger is such that Jesus urges us actively to avoid public notice and focus on the Father in heaven who sees in secret so that our actions may be done in relationship to Him. Such a focus develops an authentic trust in God and an authentic life that genuinely shines in a world blind to God and can lead others to look for and glorify God.

## **Giving to the Needy and Fasting**

Here Jesus is helping us block false motives and focus on authentic life and act before God who knows the reality of our heart. Elsewhere he focuses on the content of the action. In Mt 25:31-46, for example, Jesus portrays a kind of service to others that is not motivated by praise or introspection or even pleasing God, but on the need of the person served. It is much like the redefinition of Fasting in Isaiah 58 merging fasting with justice and giving to those in need: Break bonds of oppression, feed the hungry, help the homeless. Fasting can be a wonderful spiritual discipline, in itself largely invisible. We learn freedom from our desire for food/things. Manifested in becoming God's means of meeting needs.

## **Rewards, Treasures, and Altruism**

Jesus speaks of losing and gaining rewards and of laying up treasure in heaven. Aren't we supposed to be altruistic: doing good for no other motive than that it is right? Doesn't the talk of rewards turn our relationship with God into something mercenary? Jesus says no. He wants our lives aimed at something good. We are not called as disciples so that we can suffer loss and gain nothing. But there are different kinds of rewards. A reward is destructive/mercenary if it is foreign not naturally connected to the action – applause for fasting. A true reward is "the activity itself in consummation" (C. S. Lewis). The treasure in Heaven (God's dimension) is ultimately that we gain our life, our self, in union with God. We share in God's beauty, security, generosity, freedom, wholeness.