

Jesus himself was a contrast. John, the apostle, wrote, “The Word became flesh and lived among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father full of grace and truth.” John 1:14. And John the Baptist said, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” John 1:17. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus shows us many extremes, some of which are to be accepted, some to be rejected, and some to be moderated.

In the church today, thoughts differ on sermon types. During my lifetime I have known preachers who seemed to preach only what we called “Fire and Brimstone” sermons. Sin was blasted and hell was often talked about. Other ministers preached about faith and love and seldom, if ever, blasted sinners or mentioned hell. That seems to be the preferred style today. Jesus used both. In Luke’s version of a sermon similar to the Sermon on the Mount, the **blessed** verses are followed by a list of **woe** verses. There are a lot of woe verses in the gospels.

Jesus even included hell in his teaching. “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has the power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.” Luke 12:4-5. Eight were publically beheaded in the Middle East, a few years ago, because they would not deny Jesus and accept their captors’ religion. They must have been thinking of that. How often do we see such great faith?

A lot of contrasts are taught by Jesus on giving and praying and some on fasting. In all three cases, we are told not to do these things to be seen of men. “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 men.” Matthew 6:2. In our time, the equivalent might be having your picture taken giving a large check to a deserving charity. That is fine for a company. They want the good will of the community. But when we give privately, the Father will know and he is the one who matters.

Jesus said, “Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.” Matthew 5:42. Luke adds, “Lend to them without expecting to get anything back.” Luke 6:35b. My wife was like that. I told her one time not to expect a repayment. Her answer was, “I know that, but it’s the right thing to do.” She never regretted it.

Sometimes, it is the time to stop. Jesus also said, “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.” Matthew 7:6. When I was 26 and had just moved to Rolla, MO, two carloads came by just as church was over. They wanted enough money to get to Arizona. Someone suggested we have their gas tanks filled. I suggested that would not get them home. So we gave them \$85. That night a church called from 30 miles away and said they were there and asking for money. We should have checked their story.

Someway, between Jesus' two extremes, we must learn to do our best to give responsibly.

Jesus' teachings on praying give us many contrasts. Like on giving, he also tells us not to pray to be seen of men. "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to the Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Matthew 6:6. Jesus didn't have a room to go into but he did go out alone on the mountain for his private place to pray. The next verse says not to keep on babbling like the pagans who think they will be heard for their many words. Then he gives us the most remembered prayer in the Bible.

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." Matthew 6:9-13. Fifty-two words! The prayer is short and to the point. Some translations will have a slightly different word count, and some of the late manuscripts add "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

I used to think we should not use that prayer, the kingdom has come. If you stop with the idea that the kingdom has come, that would be true. But has it come like the prayer says? Is his will being done, on earth as it is in heaven? Has it come that way? If that is what we are praying about, we have a lot more praying to do.

That prayer was short, but in contrast, John needed all of Chapter 17 to record one of Jesus' personal prayers. And there are multiple occasions where Jesus prayed all night. He wasn't babbling. He had a lot to talk to his father about. Don't say a lot just to make your prayers long, but if there is a lot to be said, find a private place and pray it.

The parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector, Luke 18:9-14, teaches us a lot, but I fear the Pharisee's posture causes us to never lift our hands to God in prayer. Paul wrote Timothy, "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer without anger or disputing." I Timothy 2:8. Maybe we should preamble our prayer by asking God to cleanse our hands and our hearts so we can lift our hands to God in prayer.

Sometimes we think we should not bother God by praying about the same thing over and over. But Jesus told us about the widow who asked the Judge several times for justice. Shortly before his arrest, Jesus prayed in Gethsemane "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Matthew 26:39b. He repeated that prayer twice more before his arrest. And his advice to the disciples was, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak." Matthew 26:41. All of us should heed that advice.

The following verses about salt and light were given to the disciples before the teaching on giving and praying. I chose to have them follow those teachings to show the great contrasts. The solution is simple, we shouldn't be blowing our trumpet or bragging about what we have done or are doing, but neither should we hide our faith and actions.

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.” Matthew 5:13.

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:14-16.

The verses on salt have caused much discussion. What does it mean? Salt will remain salt, but it can become contaminated and useless. I like the King James translation better than the NIV. It says if the salt has lost its **savor**. Other translations say, lost its **flavor**. Both of those translations are good. You add salt to things to improve the flavor. Now, what about us? Do we add good flavor wherever we are? Are family gatherings more enjoyable because we are there? Are our church groups better because we are there? Do we add a good flavor at work? If everyone dreads to see us up show up at any of these events, or others, we need to change. Pray that we always make the pot better.

What about our light? We don't have to brag, that may show we are immature. One of my sons had a friend whose family had been very poor. His dad started a business that made them rich. For a while, they would tell you what everything they bought cost. A few years later they never mentioned money. They had matured.

A mature Christian is like that. Everyone just knows. That is a good man or woman or family. They see what they do. They see them go to worship regularly. When they need help or advice they know where to go. I had a friend who did hundreds of things that were never known to others until his funeral. A lot of people came to church because they worked with him, or were in a club with him, or just knew him. He was the kind of light Jesus was talking about. There are a lot of Christians like him, but we all need to be.

Another set of contrasting teaching concerns judging and condemning. Jesus said, “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” Luke 6:37. In contrast, Jesus also taught, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them.” Matthew 7:15-16a. He goes on to teach, good trees bear good fruit and bad trees bear bad fruit.

Too many people get into arguments, each judging and condemning the other and nothing is gained. Quiet teaching can sometimes solve a problem, like Priscilla and Aquila did with Apollos. A good elder told me one time, “We can't be judges, but sometimes we have to be fruit inspectors.” But the quiet teaching should be tried first. Good elders face these problems a lot. Others do too. God, help us relate properly with other people.

Several of the parables show great contrasts. Consider the parable of the ten virgins. The discussion is about when the Son of Man will return. Matthew 25:1-5 sets up the story. “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴ The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.”

Now let us paraphrase the rest of the story. About midnight the bridegroom came and everyone was called to go out and meet him. When they went to trim their lamps the foolish ones were out of oil. The wise ones had oil in reserve. The foolish ones asked the wise ones for oil but were told to go and buy their own.

The wise ones went in with the groom and the door was shut. When the foolish ones returned they begged to be let in but they were not. Then Jesus added, “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.” Matthew 25:13.

A man named Robert Shank believed, and contended, that if the bridegroom had come earlier, all ten could have entered. Therefore, he concluded, you can lose your salvation. For that position, he was expelled from his denomination at their national convention. Shank has written several books including *Life in the Son* and *Elect in the Son*.

Many use other scriptures, to reach the same conclusion. Some like the story of the Prodigal Son because it shows you can lose your life with the Father and gain it back. I like to use what Paul said, “I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” I Corinthians 9:27. (NKJV) If Paul can be disqualified, anyone can.

The parable of the sheep and the goats should make us search our hearts. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.” Matthew 25:31-33. Both think they have served Him. The test will be, “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” Matthew 25:35-36.

The righteous asked, “When did we do these things for you?” He will say, “When you did it for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me.” Those on the left will ask, “When did we see you needing those things and not help you.” He will answer in effect, “If you did not do it for them, you did not do it for me.”

Those who had done those things received their eternal blessing. Those who had not done those things were rejected. When that time comes, will He be pleased with our efforts?