

Secret Service 3-21-04

Matthew 6:1-6,16-18

Matthew 6:1-6 (NIV) ¹"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, 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 men. I tell you the truth, 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 men. I tell you the truth, 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.

Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV) ¹⁶"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, 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 men 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 our study in the Sermon on the Mount, we have seen Jesus' expansion of the Law to include what goes on in the heart. Now, in this next chapter, we see Jesus is again addressing a problem within the heart of man. (Matthew 15:19-20) One thing we see from history is that the heart of man never changes. The problems in people that Jesus confronts have been problems in the heart of man from creation to this day. Those problems take on different expressions, but they stem from the exact same heart condition. As we read Jesus' instruction, we need to let the Holy Spirit make the application to our lives and point out similar problems in our hearts.

You will notice that I set aside the passage on prayer for next week. I wanted to include the 16th through the 18th verses because they are along the same lines as the first six. You probably noted a repeated pattern. Jesus would warn not to do something for the sake of being seen. Then He would tell the correct way to worship, in secret. In each of these, giving, praying, and fasting, you can receive a temporal earthly reward, or an eternal heavenly reward. It depends on the heart's motivation. The Jews considered these three things to be the three pillars of religious life. Jesus wasn't disputing that. He was asking that we look at the motivation for our actions.

The first verse summarizes what Jesus is trying to convey. "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. It doesn't matter what your act of righteousness or worship is, we are to be careful that we don't perform them in public, or we will not have a heavenly reward. We have had a sermon on this topic of rewards, *misthos*, so I won't go too deeply into it. (Jesus Advice on Investing pt. 1 & 2) This word can mean wages or the natural product of toils and endeavors. (1 Corinthians 3:8) God is just. He can't be unjust. (Zechariah 9:9) When you work for Him, He gives you your

Commented [notes1]: ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'" Matthew 15:19-20 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ⁸Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. 1 Corinthians 3:8 (KJV)

Commented [notes3]: ⁹Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. Zechariah 9:9 (KJV)

payment. The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23) The wages of righteous acts done in secret are a heavenly reward. I don't know exactly what that will look like. I know it often results in blessings in this life, but what is the currency of heaven? The reward for faithfulness in one of Jesus' parables was more responsibility. (Matthew 25:23) The Bible speaks of crowns and treasure in heaven, but I think the Spirit is using words that we can relate to. Who doesn't like to be rewarded? Our motivation is the life of Christ in us, but we are rewarded as well.

In every one of these examples, Jesus tells us how we can either have a reward of the praise of man, or God's reward. Which would you prefer? We would readily answer, "The reward of God!" but when we are faced with whether to keep silent about our deed or to let it leak out, we find out which our heart really prefers. (John 12:43) Jeremiah tells us the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked. (Jeremiah 17:9) David said that we often can't discern our own errors. (Psalms 19:12)

Let's examine each of these acts of worship and then apply what we learn to any form of worship. The first was the act of giving. Last week we learned that it was required in the Old Testament Law to help the poor. (Deuteronomy 15:7-11) People gave directly to the needy or to the Temple Treasury. *"There was one particularly lovely custom connected with the Temple. In the Temple there was a room called The Chamber of the Silent. People who wished to make atonement for some sin placed money there; and poor people from good families who had come down in the world were secretly helped by these contributions."*—Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)

It provided a great way to give in secret. We have the Benevolent Fund. You can give at any time by designating your offering to the needy. It goes in a separate account and the elders determine who has a genuine need. Nobody knows who gave it or who received it, though records are kept for the IRS to insure that there is not an abuse of the funds.

The Rabbis of Jesus' day would have agreed with Jesus on this issue of secret giving. In fact, they are quoted as saying, *"He who gives alms in secret is greater than Moses."*—Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT) That shows how highly they thought of secret giving. The next quote from Tobiah 12:8 seems to indicate that they believed that alms giving was so highly regarded by God that it could purge sin. *"It is better to give alms than to lay up gold; alms giving doth deliver from death, and it purges away all sin."* We know that is not true, but it reveals to us how highly they regarded it. It shows that they understood the heart of God was for the needy and opposed to pride. (James 4:6) In spite of understanding that secret giving was more valued in the eyes of God, people in Jesus' day made a big show of giving.

In (Luke 21:1) we read about the rich casting great amounts into the treasury, where all could see them. A widow gave two of the smallest coins of that day. Jesus commented that she had given more than everyone because she had nothing left. Jesus didn't measure giving by the quantity of the gift but by the quantity of what was left. Using Jesus' criteria, we should measure our generosity by what we have left after giving.

Commented [notes4]: ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 6:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ²³"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'
Matthew 25:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ⁴³For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.
John 12:43 (KJV)

Commented [notes7]: ⁹The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?
Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: ¹²Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.
Psalms 19:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: ⁷If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. ⁸Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs. ⁹Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," so that you do not show ill will toward your needy brother and give him nothing. He may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. ¹⁰Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. ¹¹There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.
Deuteronomy 15:7-11 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: ⁶But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."
James 4:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: ¹As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury.
Luke 21:1 (NIV)

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 men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.*

It sounds like some people made sure everyone saw how much they gave. Jesus said that they got the payment they were after, in full. Nothing more is owed. There was actually a common practice in Jerusalem in which someone would hire a water carrier. They would pay the person to fill a large jar of water and bring it into the middle of the city and invite people to have a drink of water on them. They would ask for the recipient of the water to bless them as they received the “free” gift.

We have something similar today. My grandparents gave liberally to Baptist works in Arizona. A large part of their estate disappeared with the collapse of the Baptist Foundation. They had buildings named after them so that everyone would know that they gave money or land. Some folks give money for a hospital, and their name is imprinted on the tile so that everyone that uses the facility will see how generous they were. There is nothing wrong with that, but Jesus says, “Paid in full.” He is asking us, for our eternal good, to give secretly. Don’t let anyone know. Your rate of return is much better in the Bank of Heaven!

We have some in our congregation that give secretly. They take this seriously. But if I told you who they were, I’d be in big trouble, because they want their reward in heaven. I think it boils down to a matter of which life you put the most hope and faith in. Abraham is said to have set his eyes on a city whose builder and maker is God. (Hebrews 11:9-10) Where are your eyes fixed?

³*But 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.*

We have some needs in our congregation. Will you love your brother or sister enough to quietly, without anyone knowing, meet those needs just because of your love for the Lord? You do realize that they are the body of Christ, don’t you? When we don’t help our brother or sister in need, we are neglecting the body of Christ. I challenge you to obey this passage by finding a way to give to them in which they will not discover who it was that helped them. And one more challenge, resist the urge to tell anyone about it. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you in heaven.

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 men. I tell you the truth, 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.*

We don’t have this problem. It is a challenge to get someone to pray. We are so self-conscious. Be God-conscious instead! He is your Father. Just say what is on your heart like you are talking to a respected friend. You don’t have to use special words or phrases. Communicate your heart at that moment to the One who is willing to hear and help. It doesn’t have to go on and on or use special words. It can be one sentence. A sincere prayer is better than flowery words any day. When someone sincerely prays, “Lord help us today! Amen” it is as good as “Almighty Maker of

Commented [notes12]: ⁹By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. Hebrews 11:9-10 (NIV)

heaven and earth, we do humbly beseech Thee to give us Thine omnipotent assistance, blah, blah, blah..." God's not impressed. Pray your heart.

Man has a tendency to talk to people when they pray. Some folks preach a message in their prayer. I'm guilty of that sometimes. Just speak your heart to God. It'll be a lot easier to pray in public if you are used to praying out loud in private. I like to pray in my car. I pray out loud to keep my thoughts from wandering. Spend some time on a regular, even scheduled basis talking to your Father. That is something just between the two of you, and He will reward you for taking time to be with Him. Isn't He generous! He invites you to share your burdens and hear His helpful direction, and then He rewards you for doing it. God is so good!

¹⁶"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, 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 men 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.

You will notice that Jesus doesn't say, "If you give alms" or "If you pray" or "If you fast". He says WHEN you do... He expected those who were listening to do those things. Fasting has come back into consideration in the last 20 years. The hundred previous years almost nothing was written on the subject, but since the early 1970s a number of popular books have come out. The late Bill Bright organized groups of people to fast forty days for revival in our nation. Since Jesus is our example in all things, and He fasted, (Matthew 4:2) I would encourage everyone to consider it, not as a religious ritual, but as a time of drawing close to the Lord.

Commented [notes13]: ²After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. Matthew 4:2 (NIV)

You never realize what power food has in our thought life and daily routine until you go without. But when you fast, let it be just between you and the Father. Of course you will need to tell your spouse, but other than that, it is not necessary that anyone should know.

It seems that in each of these acts of worship, our Father God is seeking an intimate relationship. He wants the motives of our heart to be purely for Him. (Exodus 20:5) He wants an intimacy with you that is unmixed with other motivations. Imagine if your spouse wanted an intimate conversation with you, and tried to carry on a conversation on the phone at the same time, or if you were reading a love poem to your spouse and they kept looking over at the TV. God is serious about a relationship with you, and He wants you to be just as serious about that relationship.

Commented [notes14]: ⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, Exodus 20:5 (NIV)

It reminds me of the instruction that the Apostle Paul gave to slaves.

²²Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

²³Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, ²⁴since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Colossians 3:22-24 (NIV)

This passage has the same idea applied to our everyday work. Do whatever you do as working for the Lord. He rewards that kind of a heart. You can ask yourself, "If no one

ever found out, would I still do this just to please Jesus?" It is an effective way to check your heart's motivation to see if it has that sincerity and reverence for the Lord that Paul is describing.

Let us ask ourselves if we act to be seen or to sincerely please the Lord? If we find our heart relishes the acknowledgement of man, we have something we can do about it. Take it before the Lord and ask for a heart transformation. Ask for a desire to truly please God alone. (Psalm 51:10) Then put these things into practice. Give in secret to someone in need. Take some secret time of prayer. Fast, and try to not let anyone know. Jesus wants your religious service to be secret service from your heart to Him alone. It is a call from the loving heart of the Lord to you personally. "Come meet me, alone. I want to hear your heart. I want to share with you the instruction and guidance that will send you in the best direction. I want to share my heart with you." Do you hear His call? (Isaiah 55:3) Then decide right now when you will answer. Perhaps this afternoon you can set aside some time to meet with the Lord and get His direction to you on giving, praying and fasting. Not "if" but "when".

Let me close with a letter that the Lord may want some of us to hear.

My dear child,

I tried to wake you last night so we could have an intimate conversation, but you asked me to let you sleep. I let you sleep. I was waiting for you to come to me in the morning, but you found so many things to do. You promised to meet me, but ran out of time.

During the day I shaped the clouds in such a way as to turn your thoughts to me, but you were soon on to the next thing in your "to do" list. We began a conversation when you were listening to Christian radio, but it ended all too quickly. When you asked me to bless your food, I thought perhaps you would still your heart for a moment to let me respond, but you did not.

In the evening you came home, tired from your busy day. I thought you would sit with my Word in front of you and let me speak comfort and encouragement to your heart, but you turned on the TV and let it capture your thoughts for hours.

When you headed for bed I knew we would have a moment together, and we finally did. It only lasted for a minute and you were sound asleep. At least I was able to tell you I love you and ask for more time with you tomorrow. I have so much to share with you, but I will not force you to spend time with me. Your life could have so much more meaning and purpose. Won't you give me the time?

Your loving Redeemer,
Jesus

Commented [notes15]: ¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Psalms 51:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: ³Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. Isaiah 55:3 (NIV)