

Matthew

Sermon on the Mount

June 23, 2024

I. Introduction

- A. **Matthew 6:1–6, 16-21**, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have **no reward** with your Father who is in heaven. [2] So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their **reward in full**. [3] But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret **will reward** you. [5] When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their **reward in full**. [6] But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret **will reward** you. . . . [16] Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their **reward in full**. [17] But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face [18] so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret **will reward** you. [19] Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. [20] But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; [21] for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
- B. In **Matthew 5:21-48**, Jesus uses the OT Law and some popular teachings of His day to talk about our relationships with the people around us, and the importance of treating them the way we want to be treated. In doing this, He is showing us the kind of righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees.
- C. In **Matthew 6:1-21**, Jesus uses three religious practices (*charity, praying, fasting*) to talk about seeking God’s approval over the approval of men so that we actually have a meaningful relationship with God with a quality and depth that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees.

D. Toward the middle of **chapter 6 (vs 7-15)**, Jesus gives some specific direction about prayer and forgiveness. We will return to that after looking at what He says about charity, praying, and fasting.

E. Pray

II. Warning, hypocrisy, rewards

A. Jesus begins this section on the three common religious practices with a double warning: **First**, beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them. **Second**, if you display your righteousness to be noticed by others, you will receive **no reward** from God. Your reward will be the praise and admiration of those you are trying to impress.

1. To “**beware**” of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them is to be on guard against it, and to pay attention to the **why** of what you are doing so that you do not do it for the wrong reasons.
2. In other words, be on guard against turning the religious practices that are intended to be between you and God, into practices that are between you and those observing, in an effort to gain praise and admiration from them.
 - a. Sadly, we need to be warned about this because using religion to gain praise and admiration from those around us is a common problem within the church – from those in leadership to the teenagers who want to use their musical skills to help lead worship.
3. Jesus also warns us about rewards. When we take something that is intended to be between God and us and turn it into something between us and those around us, we cease doing it to please God or bring glory to God. Rather, we do it to bring glory to ourselves, and in so doing, we lose out on the rewards that come from God.
4. As Jesus said, when we use religious activities to gain praise and admiration from others, whatever praise and admiration we gain becomes **all** the reward we will get.

B. Jesus started this section with a warning about the folly of using God and our religious practices to gain praise and admiration from those around us. He concludes it with a warning about the folly of pursuing treasure that will not hold its value and cannot be protected against being lost or stolen.

1. [19] “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. [20] But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; [21] for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

2. The point is, we can either use God and Christianity to seek and accumulate the earthly treasure of praise and admiration from those around us – which Jesus calls laying up treasure on earth, **or** we can live for the praise, pleasure, and glory of God, and be rewarded by God with the kind of treasure that holds its value and is ours forever.
- C. Before moving on to the three religious activities, there are two phrases that appear in each example (**6:2, 6:5, 6:16**) that deserve our attention. The first phrase is: “As the hypocrites do,” and the second phrase is: “They have their reward in full.”
1. **As the hypocrites do:**
 - a. A hypocrite is someone who in certain settings acts better than he is (*puts on a show*) in order to gain praise, or approval, or admiration, or favor, or honor for something he isn’t.
 - b. In using this phrase, Jesus is saying that we are hypocrites when we use God and religious activities to gain praise and adoration of people for being godly or spiritually advanced.
 2. **They have their reward in full**
 - a. To have your reward in full means you have received every bit of reward that will be given.
 - b. In other words, when we use God and religious activities to gain peoples’ praise and admiration, then whatever praise and admiration we gain is all the reward we will get. Nothing – no rewards and no answers to prayer – will come from God.

III. Three ways to seek either man’s or God’s approval

- A. **Charity:** [2] So when you give to the poor, **do not** sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. [3] But when you give to the poor, **do not** let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] **so that** your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret **will reward** you.
1. Here in **vs 3-4**, Jesus says our acts of charity are to be done in private – away from the eyes of others. Jesus also applies this privacy principle to praying and fasting.
 2. Yet Jesus also says that we are to let our light shine before others in such a way that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in heaven (**Matthew 5:16**).
 3. Could it be that the Christian life is both a private and a public life? The simple answer is yes. But beyond this simple yes lies two important truths that condition the yes.

- a. **First truth:** Jesus' call to privacy in charity (*and praying and fasting*) is first and foremost a call to right motives, regardless of how private we can be or how public we must be in the religious activities of charity, praying, and fasting.
 - b. **Second truth:** The right motive is living the Christian life for the glory and pleasure of God, not the glory and pleasure of self.
 - (1) Therefore, though there are times when our religious activities cannot be hidden from public view, they still are to be done for the love, the pleasure, and the glory of God, not the glory of self.
 - (2) Or to say it another way, our religious activities are to be done for God's sake, not our sake – and we have the ability to discern the difference – if we will look honestly at our motives. This means that we bear the responsibility to discern our true motives when doing religious acts in view of others.
 - c. Sadly, churches and Christian organizations have worked against this teaching by appealing to people's pride and self-interest in order to encourage giving. And they have done this by offering various forms of public acknowledgment to those who give – such as a plaque on the wall, a name on a building, an article in a newsletter, or an acknowledgment in the church service.
4. As for the rewards of charity, **Proverbs 19:17** says it well, "One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and He will repay him for his good deed." Jesus added this supporting promise in **Luke 6:38**, "Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure – pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."
- B. **Prayer:** [5] When you pray, you **are not** to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their **reward in full**. [6] But you, when you pray, **go into** your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret **will reward** you.
1. Like charity, prayer cannot always be private. For example, we pray at meals, we pray in church, in prayer meetings and Bible studies; we pray at weddings and funerals, and at the bedside of someone in the hospital.
 2. Yet though prayer is not always private, it ought to always be between you and God – and never between you and the audience.

- a. Once you start being concerned what others will think of our prayer, you cease interacting with God, and start interacting with the audience. That is not prayer, that is an effort to impress those listening, or at least avoid feeling embarrassed.
 - b. However, as with giving, so with praying – our motive is what matters most. How we say what we want to communicate is almost insignificant by comparison.
 - (1) **Consider**, we could pray the most intimate, spiritual sounding, awe inspiring prayer, and do so to gain praise and admiration from those listening. Yet to do this is to talk to the audience, not God.
 - (2) Or we could pray the most childish sounding, inelegant prayer **and be talking only** to God. It is not the words or how we sound to anyone listening. What matters is **who** we are talking to and the sincerity with which we are talking to Him.
 3. The reality is, when praying in the presence of others, we either pray to God, or we pray to the audience. When we pray to God, He is the focus of our attention. When we pray to the audience, the audience and what they think of us is our focus.
 4. The rewards of prayer come from the focus of our praying. If we are praying to God, then His willingness to interact with us, and His response, are our rewards. If we are praying to the audience, their praise and admiration for a well-crafted prayer are our rewards.
 - a. God’s rewards are eternal, more valuable than gold or diamonds, and cannot be lost or stolen.
 - b. The audiences’ rewards are confined to the moment, of no value beyond this world, and can be lost when the fickle audience finds someone else who’s prayers sound more spiritual and well-crafted.
 5. Therefore, beware when praying in a public setting. Examine yourself to discern to whom you are praying. True, you will be rewarded either way, but only God’s rewards have lasting value.
- C. **Fasting:** [16] Whenever you fast, **do not** put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their **reward in full**. [17] But you, when you fast, **anoint** your head and **wash** your face [18] so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret **will reward** you.
1. This is Jesus’ third example of a religious activity that is to be between God and you. Once you let others know you are fasting – with the hope

- of impressing them, your fasting ceases to be between God and you, and whatever you had hoped to get from God will not be forthcoming.
2. Therefore, if you want reward from God, use your fasting to draw nearer to Him, or to show Him how sincere you are about something, or to please Him in some way.
 3. Remember, what God thinks of your righteousness matters now and for eternity, whereas what the people around you think of your righteousness has value for only as long as they think it. And since you cannot have both, better the reward of God's approval and all that comes with it, than man's approval.
- D. Therefore Jesus says, [19] **Do not** store up for yourselves treasures on earth (*the treasure of man's praise, admiration, and all that comes with it*), where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. [20] **But** store up for yourselves treasures in heaven (*the treasure of God's praise, approval, intimate fellowship, and all the rewards that comes with it*), where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; [21] **for** where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

IV. Conclusion

- A. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. In other words, what you value most has the most influence on how you live your life. If you want to see the truth about what you value most, thoughtfully examine how you are living your life. If you need help to see the truth about what you value most, pray David's prayer: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious (*restless*) thoughts" (**Psalm 139:23**).
- B. In **John 5:44** Jesus asked, "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?"
 1. The reality is, you cannot believe that God's will, ways, and word show you the only sane and sensible way to live **if** you are seeking praise, affirmation, and admiration from the people around you – people whose beliefs and values are not built on God and His word, but rather are built on self-interest, fitting in, and feeling important.
 2. Such people may think they know the most sane and sensible way to live, but they don't – and neither will you if you live to gain their praise and admiration.
 3. As we sang today, "Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise. Thou mine inheritance, now and always; Thou and Thou only, first in my heart, High King of heaven, my Treasure Thou art."
 4. May God – not people's praise and admiration – be our treasure, now and throughout eternity.