

To Be Seen By Men, Part I: Charitable Deeds

Call to Worship: Psalm 119:89-96

1st Scripture: Matthew 23:1-12

2nd Scripture: Matthew 6:1-4

Hymn Insert- *Come People of the Risen King*

Hymn Insert- *What Grace is Mine*

Hymn Insert- *I Surrender All*

Introduction

Having completed our Lord's, "You have heard it said...but I say to you," declarations, where He had addressed the specific erroneous *teachings* of the religious leaders, and having pulled out the general principle found therein, we now move into a new section of the sermon, where our Lord addresses the specific ungodly *actions* of the religious leaders. And here again, we will find Him utilizing a handful of examples to help bring out one critical, general principle.

For this morning, we will seek to extract the general principle (which will continue to be reiterated in the weeks to come), as we seek to open up the first portion of this section of our Lord's sermon.

I. The Underlying, General Principle (vs. 1)

Our Lord begins this section then, with the statement, "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your father in heaven" (vs. 1).

Now, before we closely examine this statement, it is important to recognize its repeated emphasis, given in the next two actions of worship that our Lord addresses, as well. This will help us grasp the general principle that He is seeking to bring out here, which deals with the very heart of the corrupt actions of the religious leaders. Notice, when dealing with the matter of prayer, in verse 5, our Lord states, "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, *that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.*

And then, note again, in verse 16, where our Lord addresses the matter of "fasting," He states, "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they

disfigure their faces that they may *appear to men* to be fasting. *Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.*

Now, as we bring these three actions together; Charitable deeds, praying, and fasting, we can note a handful of connective elements that our Lord would use, to bring out a general principle, related to the Christian's active life.

- 1) All three of these examples involve acts of worship.
- 2) All three of these examples are used to expose a hypocritical form of worship.
- 3) All three of these examples involve the receiving of rewards.
- 4) All three of these examples convey a singular, general principle, which ought to govern the worship of God's true people.

Let us briefly address the first three of these connective elements, leading into addressing the fourth, critical general principle, which is meant to be drawn out of the summation of them all, and applied to every area of the Christian life, especially as it pertains to worshipping and serving God.

- 1) All three of these examples involve acts of worship.

a- Doing charitable deeds. What are charitable deeds? In a general sense, they include any form of giving, helping, aiding or providing for, an individual or individuals who have a need. This would include all forms of generous assistance, but especially that which is done for the church, as an expression of worship to our God.

b- Praying. Of course, praying involves speaking to God, in the forms of praise, confession of sin, supplications, requests, intercessions; again, all as a means of exhibiting worship to our God.

c- Fasting. This involves afflicting the body, by refusing to eat for some period of time (refusing to be moved by the pangs of hunger), with the intent of fervently seeking God about some matter of importance, generally including an expression of personal grief, and a casting of one's whole confidence upon God alone. Again, this involves an act of humble and submissive worship, as one seeks God in a special way.

And so, all three of these acts, involve acts of worship, which were certainly common in the lives of God's people. And again, while the Lord uses these three, specific

examples, He means to convey a general principle, which would encase the entire “worship life,” of those who are truly part of His kingdom, in contradistinction to the hypocritical acts of worship put forth by the Scribes and Pharisees, which brings us to address our second connective element.

2) All three of these examples are used to expose a hypocritical form of worship. In fact, in all three examples, the religious leaders are specifically referred to as “hypocrites,” indicating that the worship which they had offered to God, was insincere and cloaked with ungodly motives. And the common thread of this hypocrisy, found in their charitable giving, praying and fasting, was that they performed these actions, in such a way that they would be “Seen by men.” That is to say that, their reason for performing these acts of worship, was not to glorify God, but rather, to draw attention to themselves. We can say it this way. In their alleged acts of worship, they themselves, were actually seeking to be worshiped. They wanted others to behold their religious acts, leaving off an aura of righteousness, so that, they might receive the praises of men.

3) All three of these examples involve the receiving of rewards. Without trying to sound pious, this is the most difficult area for me to address, personally, because I know beyond the shadow of any doubt that I deserve no reward, ever, from the Lord. That said, it’s biblical and must be addressed. Clearly, the Scriptures speak of varying degrees of rewards, which the righteous receive in accordance with their faithful service to God. That such rewards are grounded in the pure grace of God, which is the only source of our doing anything good, is undeniable, but God rewards His people, nonetheless, as if, our deeds came solely from us. Well, here, our Lord says that those who worship and serve God, as the hypocrites do (to be seen by men), already receive their reward from men. The praise that they covet from others is their reward, leaving them nothing to receive from God. In other words, every act of worship they do, brings about no personal benefit; it is ultimately useless in God’s sight, because the motivation for such actions is to glorify *self* and not God. And so, they have their reward in this life. They merit the praises of men, as it were. There is no credit to their religious acts of service.

Having considered the common elements of these three examples of acts of worship, let us now draw out the underlying, general principle, which is to govern all acts of worship, for the true people of God; for those who are truly blessed, and part of the Kingdom of God.

4) The general principle for worship and Christian service is this: As we have seen throughout this entire sermon, God is always concerned about the heart. This is the underlying principle of everything that makes up the entire Sermon on the Mount, for that matter. God is always concerned about *why* we do what we do, and not merely *with what* we do. In all of our worship then, brethren, we ought always to concern ourselves with the true motives for every act of Christian service we perform, so as to ensure that our intention is always to bring glory to God and not ourselves. And if we are honest, this is by no means easy. I want to suggest to you, brethren, that we must always be ever conscience and aware of the fact, that our sin nature will always compel us to covet the praises of men. Until we get to heaven, there will always be a part of us (and a rather strong part, at that) which will want to do all that we do, to be seen by men. Making sacrifices, performing any act of Christian service, in such a way as to remain content without getting some form of immediate recognition, notoriety or praise; simply doing it unto the Lord, is especially difficult, and it requires faith and trust in our invisible God, confident that He sees and will bless our labors. It's a "faith investment," and "faith investments" require faith.

I can say that from the standpoint of ministry, this is always a very present battle within my own heart. There is a real part of me that wants to stand at the front, and to be seen as something special or "more than," in and of myself. And I have to be very intentional about contending with my flesh, in this regard. If I become too casual, or if I let my guard down, I will easily (very easily) get swept into the mindset of seeking self-praise. I wish it were like a computer, where I could just change the default setting once, and then, know that everything will run right according to the will of God. But my computer is still damaged, and it is constantly seeking to bring me back to the old settings.

Let us then see this principle, specifically worked out in our first example.

II. Charitable Deeds (vs. 2-4)

"Therefore, when you do a charitable deed ("give to the needy" - ESV), do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable

deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly” (Matt. 6:2-4).

And so, our Lord utilizes the very real and relevant example of what the religious leaders used to do, so as to flash their righteous deeds before all to see. When they gave to the needy, or when they helped anyone in any sense (be it, in the synagogues or in the streets), they always sought to make sure that all that they did, was at the opportune time, when others could behold their charitable deeds. They wanted to flash their piety and generosity before all, so that, they would be praised for their actions. And to this end, they really had no genuine concern for those who they were helping, nor for the glory of God, because they were, in essence, purchasing “personal praise.” As they did in all other cases, they took God’s law, and twisted it unto really serving their own selfish ambitions, rather than God. And this put a deep, crimson stain on their worship, in the sight of God.

You see, the idea of “sounding a trumpet,” is not to be taken literally, but rather, it is to present the idea of doing things in such a way that would intentionally bring attention to your charitable service. There’s a premeditated design of seeking to gain the attention of other people, so that, they can see just how pious and righteous and holy, you really are. In the case of the religious leaders, they probably sought to outdo each other in this regard. And again, by doing this, they were constantly planting billboards that shouted aloud, “Look at how great and holy I am. Don’t you wish you could be like me. I’m giving to this individual and I’m meeting this need. Maybe one day, you other people can try to be like me...etc.” And brethren, while we would certainly be repulsed by this kind of thinking, let us not be deceived into thinking that such evil is not present in each and every one of us. There is a part of us that is always, naturally, looking for ways to present ourselves as better or more righteous or more pious or more holy than others. And that is what our Lord is cautioning us against, here...seeking glory and praise from men.

And so, our Lord gives instructions, which would guide us to be intentional, about battling against this ungodly beast of self-promotion. He states, when you do your charitable deeds, be intentional about doing them in such a way that would be unannounced. Look for opportunities that would avoid drawing the attention of others to yourself. He uses such a

wonderful illustration, when He adds, “Don’t let the left hand know what your right hand is doing.” The suggestion almost seems silly, because how can you prevent one part of your body from knowing what another part is doing, but He does this, so as to highlight the extent that we ought to go, to avoid seeking the praises of men. This is our Lord’s means of highlighting the level of conscious effort and intentionality, which ought to be sought, when seeking to avoid drawing attention to ourselves, as we seek to perform our Christian duties. You see, even as the religious leaders craftily looked for ways to intentionally make their acts known, we are to go to the other extreme, seeking to avoid promoting ourselves, as we serve others. Imagine doing something with your right hand, and sitting on your left hand at the same time, so as to keep the left hand from seeing what the right hand is doing. You see, our Lord is emphasizing being intentional and consciously focused, but in the direction of ensuring that all that we do is truly unto the glory of God, and not unto our own glory. That’s the point of the analogy. It highlights the importance and the conscious, intentional nature of worshiping God in the right spirit, and with the right motives.

And as we strive to perform our charitable deeds with a level of secrecy, God says that He will then reward us in turn. Again, I truly have a hard time grasping this, but it is true nonetheless. God rewards us for what we do, even though, we do all that we do, in His power and by His grace, in keeping with His preordained plan, and in accordance with the direction of His Spirit. Such is the incomprehensible grace of God, isn’t it?

III. Closing Thoughts and Applications

1) Let us never assume that the praise or approval of men is indicative of the fact that God is well pleased with, or necessarily approves of, any given action. Often times, God is at odds with the majority, and it is too easy to cater to the visible, felt majority, over and above our invisible, unfelt God. We ought always, brethren, to consider and give preference to the mind and heart of God, as revealed in His Word, over and above men. We can also put it this way. There are many, many people, who are bathed in the praises of multitudes of people, and who think that they are appealing to God by their actions, but who are completely odious to God. And there are many other people, who are rejected, mocked and cast out by the multitudes, while

being well received by, and precious in the sight of God (i.e. our Lord). The approval of men and/or immediate results, are not the measure of an individual's faithfulness. It is the humble and faithful heart, which truly seeks to honor and glorify God, that is the measure of an individual's faithfulness, regardless of present, visible results. To this end, let our actions be motivated by heavenly rewards, and not the dust and tumbleweed of the praises of men. Invest in a long term, far greater glory, where, in the end, when it really matters, we will be met with the commendation of God, which has eternal ramifications.

2) Commit all of your works and acts of worship, to prayer! Brethren, the desire for self-praise is just far too strong within us. Our only hope of maintaining a humble, God-glorifying spirit, is by obtaining the supernatural aid of the Holy Spirit. And the good news is that, our Heavenly Father gladly grants His Spirit, to all who sincerely ask. Our worship, and all of our Christian labor, will always be tainted by the part of us that constantly pursues self-glory. Only the constant stream of God's grace in Christ, along with the constant aid of the Holy Spirit, can sanctify all that we do, so that, we can find any semblance of sincerity, and the type of heart that our Lord calls for, here in this sermon. We can serve God from a sincere heart. It is possible, but it is absolutely only possible, if God continues to work in us to do according to all of His good pleasure. This reality should compel us to take all of our worship and Christian service, and to commit it to prayer. And through Christ; through His shed blood and present, continual intercession, God will direct our motives and receive us.

3) Let me just briefly address what can easily be misconstrued as a contradiction in the Sermon on the Mount, if not properly understood. This morning, we have addressed the matter of doing charitable deeds, in such a way that the "left hand does not know what the right hand is doing." We emphasized the conscious need to be discreet, and not to flash our good deeds before others, so as to ensure that our desire is to please God, and not to gain the praises of men. Well, one might legitimately ask the question, "How then does this line up with what we had gone over, back in chapter 5, verses 13-16, where we are told to let others see our good works? [Read Matthew 5:13-16]

Is there a contradiction, right within the same sermon, concerning the matter of how we ought to serve and worship God; whether we ought to be as private as possible, or open, in such

a way that others can see our good deeds? No, of course not. Well, how then do we explain the seeming tension here? How do we, on the one hand, cover our good deeds, and on the other, allow them to be seen?

Well, I think the key to answering this question, once again, gets down to the motive that drives all that we do. You'll notice that in both cases, we ought to be concerned for the glory of God, and not about drawing attention to ourselves. In Chapter 5, we are called to let our light so shine before men, that others may see our good works *and glorify our Father who is in heaven*. In Chapter 6, we are to cover our charitable deeds, so as to do them unto the glory of God, and not ourselves. And so, both texts run parallel in laying forth the general principle which ought to govern us, namely, that we are to be concerned with bringing glory to God, in all that we do. And so, we can bring both concepts into a proverbial context, which is governed by the desire to bring glory to God.

In one sense, there is a place to do good deeds, in such a way that others will see them, along with the sacrifice made by doing them, as a means of testifying to the generous and glorious grace of God. At such times, you would be going out of your way to say, in a verbal or even nonverbal sense, "God's grace is making its way to you through me. What I am not worthy of, but have received, I exhibit to you, so that, you can look to the same God, who gives grace to all." And then, there is a place to avoid revealing your good deeds, especially where the danger would exist of others attributing the glory of God to you. One example, would include tithing or giving a sum of money to someone. [Also, praying fancy prayers or displaying fasting...etc] And over all, if our helping someone is something where our being revealed as the source of that help, is inevitable (to the one whom we are helping), we certainly don't have to let others know about what we are doing, or have done. Again, the general principle is that, prayerfully, we strive to use every opportunity, in such a way, that would bring glory to God, and not us. Sometimes, that involves being seen, and sometimes that involves remaining anonymous. Discerning the fine line between both possibilities, should be another motivation that drives us to pray.

4) The Gospel! What drives what you do? If it is not the glory of God, then no matter what you do, you cannot please God. Amen! Benediction: Jude 1:24-25