

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT?

Last week we looked at Matthew 6:1, where Jesus says,

Matthew 6:1 (ESV) – 1 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

This is the governing principles for Matthew 6-7; we are to live our lives for the glory of God, not for human praise and applause.

But it’s important to know that Jesus isn’t speaking about theoretical righteousness or hypothetical rewards. He’s describing actual righteous works, done by real people, for genuinely wrong reasons. In the words that follow, He immediately gives us three examples of people doing righteous things – giving, praying, and fasting – for wicked reasons.

He also includes a more lengthy teaching on prayer. We are going to spend the next few weeks talking about prayer in general, and the Lord’s prayer in particular. This morning let’s look at Matthew 6:2-6, 16-18.

PRAY!

A REPETITIVE STRUCTURE

These passages follow a particular structure; I’m sure you heard it as it went past, but let’s get it on the record.

First, a “When” statement:

- When you give
- When you pray
- When you fast

Next, a prohibition, combined with a reference to hypocrites:

- sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do
- you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners
- do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces

Then, a reference to public rewards:

- that they may be praised by others
- that they may be seen by others
- that their fasting may be seen by others

Followed by a common, sad statement:

- Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward
- Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward
- Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward

Then Jesus tells us to do these things:

- But when you give to the needy
- But when you pray
- But when you fast

And how to do them in order to please the Father:

- do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing
- go into your room and shut the door
- anoint your head and wash your face

Then a reference to doing these things privately:

- that your giving may be in secret
- pray to your Father who is in secret
- that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret

And finally, a common promise of rewards:

- And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
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It's formulaic, isn't it, even more than the six passages in Matthew 5:21-48.

- When you do a righteous work,
 - don't be a hypocrite,
 - doing it for human recognition;
 - all you will receive is that human praise.
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- Instead, when you do your righteous works,
 - do them to please the Father,
 - by doing them for His eyes only,
 - and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

TRANSITION: Let's look at these three righteous deeds a little more closely.

THE RIGHTEOUS DEEDS

Giving. Giving is commanded in the Old and New Testaments. The people of Israel were to give to support the Temple and priests, and they were to give to the storehouses, which then provided food and clothing to widows, orphans, Levites, and the poor and indigent. God took giving so seriously that in Malachi He says that those who have not given have robbed Him. Giving in the New Testament is just as important; Christians are to give for the support of those who teach them, and for the support of their church. The difference is that Old Testament giving was strictly regulated as tithes – 10% each year to the Temple, 10% every three years to the store house – while New Testament giving is according to what you purpose to give, remembering that what you give, you will also reap.

Prayer. Prayers, both public and private, are equally common in the Old and New Testaments. In a PRIVATE sense, each person was intended to personally serve God in his or her daily life, and to call upon the Lord frequently in prayer. PUBLIC worship in the Temple also included prayers recited by the priests, and prayers recited by the people. Synagogue worship included formal prayer by the leaders, and personal prayers by the congregants. Instead of each person waiting their turn, they would all pray at once. That might sound confusing – how could someone pay attention to someone else's prayer? But then again, they aren't supposed to be praying so that OTHERS could hear, but for the sake of the Lord.

Fasting. Fasting is going without food, skipping a single meal, or not eating for a day or more. It was most commonly associated with confession of sin, mourning over loss, during times of national danger, or other experiences of suffering. Moses and Jesus both fasted 40 days, Moses while receiving the Law, and Jesus in preparation for His ministry; each fasted in preparation for the heavy and crucial work that was coming. Fasting was never done in celebration; times of joy and gladness were celebrated with feasts, not with fasts.

Can I point out the obvious? Our church culture is not a fasting culture. So much of what I've heard about fasting is simply wrong, such as fasting to get God to answer prayers, or fasting for the sake of spiritual discipline, or fasting for some kind of personal advance. Biblical fasting, with just two exceptions – Moses and Jesus – was always about being in deep grief over sin, or loss, or fear, and taking our sins to the Lord, and bringing our anguish and loss to Him, and running to Him in our fear.

While Peter doesn't use the word "fast" in First Peter 5:6-7, he IS talking about what fasting is meant to accomplish:

1 Peter 5:6-7 (ESV) — 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

TRANSITION: Jesus tells us that there is a wrong way to do these things, and that is for the sake of a human audience, of receiving the praise and complements and approval of people. Jesus calls those who practice their righteousness before others in order to be noticed by them "hypocrites."

THE HYPOCRITES

The hypocrites were certainly the scribes and Pharisees, and Sadducees as well, and any others who did righteous things as a way of getting human approval.

The hypocrites drew attention to their giving. Jesus says that they sounded a trumpet before them. This may not have been a literal trumpet, but then again, it might have been. Either way, even when giving to the poor, they weren't thinking about the poor, but how they themselves would look when they gave.

The hypocrites drew attention to their praying, whether in the synagogues or on street corners. Why street corners? There's twice the foot traffic as in the middle of the block. They prayed loudly, stridently, with intense tones in their voice, thrusting their arms into the air. They did everything they could to get people to look at them as they performed.

But the hypocrites also drew attention to their fasting, which was a real challenge. It was impossible to **give** in secret, because money was real: you had to hand it over. So Jesus uses the picture of not letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing, which means giving in a subtle, unobtrusive way. While some **prayer** could be taking into the inner room and done in private, some **prayer** was meant to be in public.

But **fasting** was completely inward. Fasting means going without food, and unless you are sitting at the table and not eating, no one will notice that you're fasting. So the hypocrites took advantage of the fact that fasting is associated with suffering and sorrow, and made their faces gloomy and dismal and miserable, disfiguring their appearance, so that everyone would know they were fasting.

These righteous actions are to be done for the Father: for His approval, for His glory, that He may see. Those who **give in righteousness** are like God, whose common grace is given to all every moment of every day. Those who **pray in righteousness** ignore all the hope and promise of this fallen world, and admit that only God can answer the true needs we have. Those who **fast in righteousness** see their own grief over sin, anguish over the loss of loved ones, dismay over what the future might hold, and know that only their Father in heaven can soothe and heal and comfort them.

But the hypocrites aren't interested being seen by God, or for future rewards. They thrive on instant gratification. So they take righteous deeds and make them sinful, by selling them for profit, for the praise of other people.

The outcome is always the same for hypocrites; Jesus repeats the exact same phrase each time so that we fully understand: **Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward in full.** What did they want? Human praise. What did they get? Human praise. They got exactly what they wanted, and no more. As Jesus says, **they have received their reward in full**; that means that there was nothing more to come. Matthew 6:19 tells us what they were doing: they were storing up treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. They were not doing what Matthew 6:20 says, which is storing up treasures in heaven, where those treasures remain secure.

What sad words – **they have received their reward in full.** They went to all that effort for nothing. At least the laborer gets paid for his work. His work wears him out, but he receives his pay and provides for his family. But the hypocrites who labor for human praise – which is as temporary as a morning mist – get nothing else. They can't eat that praise, they can't spend it, they can't even hang on to it. They do the work, the crowd murmurs in appreciation, and it's gone. And infinitely worse, they lose the Father's reward.

Doing righteous works for human praise is a bad exchange.

TRANSITION: I hope that you would agree that we don't want to be hypocrites. Praise God, Jesus tells us how to protect ourselves.

PROTECTION AGAINST HYPOCRISY

Again Jesus uses repetition to make His point. Give in secret. Pray in secret. Fast in secret.

In your giving, give quietly, without drawing attention to yourself. Give for the glory of God. Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing; that is, don't even consider it you to be doing the giving, but God giving through you. Keep the Scriptures in mind, and obey them:

Galatians 6:6 (ESV) — 6 Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.

2 Corinthians 9:7 (ESV) — 7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

In your praying, pray because God hears, and not for the sake of others. Some prayer is private; keep it private. Some prayer is public, but even in public ... shhh, don't shout, don't demand, don't be insistent, don't be overly dramatic. Speak quietly to the Lord, submitted to Him. Sometimes your prayer room is a quiet place in your house. Other times your prayer room is your own heart, as you stand in the midst of turmoil and crisis. Christians are the Temple of the Holy Spirit; He is already with you; He hears and receives the faintest whispers of prayer. We aren't heard because our prayers are perfect or persuasive, but because of the love of our Father.

In your fasting, remember that your suffering and pain and fear are known by God. The key with fasting is not going without food, but **casting all your anxieties on Him**, as Peter says in First Peter 5:6-7. And because of His faithfulness, when you cast your anxieties on Him, and confess your sins to Him, and pour out your grief to Him, and tell Him of your fears, then be glad and rejoice, because **He cares for you**. Wash your face, and anoint your head. One day your Father will take away every sin and sorrow and fear; until that day, the Spirit of God is with you to strengthen you and cause you to persevere.

By God's grace, many have believers around them who speak the Word of God, and stand firm in the grace of God. But the final healing for our suffering and brokenness will never be found in another person, no matter how much they might love us. In this life we must endure, but we have the help of the Lord to endure. When this life is done, if you know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, all the pain and suffering and confusion and guilt and weakness will be gone for all time.

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT?

What do you expect from your righteous works?

The hypocrites only expected human praise, and that is all they ever got.

But Jesus speaks of very different rewards. He again uses repetition here: **And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.** Jesus doesn't tell us what those rewards will be, but it's certain that they will be infinitely greater than our works. They are the treasures that we lay up in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

It can be hard to trust in something that we have never seen, and can't really imagine. Let's be honest, even if we knew what the rewards would be, we wouldn't be capable of understanding or appreciating them. It would be much easier to convince my almost-three-year-old-granddaughter that she should start saving for her first car then to convince us, today, that a certain thing in eternity will be worth the wait.

So let's not get worried and bothered about what the rewards will be; instead, let's focus on the God who rewards us: the Father, Son, and Spirit. He is faithful. He is love. He is good and gracious. He is kind. He is our strength. He is our sufficiency. He is our anchor. He is our peace. He can be trusted to the fullest extent and beyond. He never fails. Trust Him to keep His promise of rewarding our good works.

Hebrews 11:1 (ESV) — 1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Trust in God who promises the reward, and let Him figure out what the reward itself will be.

Doing righteous works for God's glory and reward is a wonderful exchange. When God rewards us for our righteous works, the worth and value and measure of the rewards are magnified by His grace, and far outweigh our deeds. We won't receive one day's reward in eternity for one day's righteousness in this life. We will receive eternal rewards for momentary good works.

Matthew 10:42 (ESV) — 42 And whoever gives one of these little ones even A CUP OF COLD WATER because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his REWARD."

Do you see that the reward for giving a believer a single cup of cold water is an eternal reward, worth infinitely more than EVERY cup of cold water ever given in all of human history.

BRINGING IT HOME

Let's bring this home. I've already applied much of this to our lives, so let me just say this.

First, righteous works matter. Whether it is giving, praying, fasting, serving, teaching, evangelizing, helping, encouraging – these things matter. The Bible tells us that we are saved BY grace and through faith, and then immediately tells us that we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus FOR good works, which He has already prepared for us to do. We don't have to figure out what those good works are; we only need walk in faith and obedience, and He will bring them across our path.

Second, our motives matter. It isn't wrong to do righteous things WHEN people can see us; it is wicked to do righteous things SO THAT people can see us. Jesus' ministry was a public ministry; the apostles, likewise, were involved in public ministry. But Jesus and His apostles, and countless believers since, have served for the righteous motive of glorifying the Father, and not themselves.

And finally, the rewards matter. Some have, for various reasons, decided that it's wrong to do something good expecting a reward. When the reward is to come from another person, it is wrong. But it isn't wrong to expect God to reward us. Why? Because He promises to reward us! It isn't humble to say, "I don't want the reward"; that's like saying, "I trust in Jesus Christ, but I certainly don't expect Him to save me!" Christian, God has promised you rewards for your righteous acts, and Jesus expects you to be motivated by those promises. I want to hear the Lord say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And I want the rewards, so that throughout eternity I can look at them and worship God for doing such a tremendous work in my life when I was still so steeped in and trapped by my own sinful flesh. Only God can bring righteous works through an unrighteous servant. Who wouldn't want to be that servant?

Let's pray.