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Exceeding Righteousness and Our Worship; Matt 6:1-18

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Introduction – Let's recall the broader context of our text. Remember we have said that the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount is to distinguish false faith and true faith. So in the opening verses of the sermon Jesus paints a picture for us of what a true believer looks like in the Beatitudes and of what a true believer does in the salt and light passages. Then Jesus begins to draw the decisive distinction between true faith and false faith by providing example after example of the vast difference between the two when it comes to the understanding and application of Scripture. Jesus uses the two categories of the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees in contrast to an exceeding righteousness. Indeed the difference is so monumental that one leads to eternal destruction and one to the kingdom of heaven, 5:20.

Now we've observed that a Pharisaical righteousness or a legalistic or a moralist approach to Scripture boils down to a check-box religion that is purely based on what I haven't done wrong and all that I do right. While true faith or exceeding righteousness is a transformation of the heart that leads to a transformation of life. To illustrate the difference, Jesus is showing how each of these approach the law of God. The false faith takes a very minimalist approach to the law and simply keeps a record of doing good and avoiding wrong. True faith loves God and loves others and therefore glorifies God by living out His will.

In 5:21-48 Jesus exposes the error of false faith boasting in avoiding doing wrong by twisting the law of God, while true faith is not so much concerned with demonstrating how it avoids doing wrong but rather is concerned with loving God and loving others and as a result actually does avoid doing wrong.

Now in 6:1-18 Jesus is exposing the error of false faith in boasting of how it does good, while true faith does good from the heart. He does so by looking at the difference in how we worship in our giving, praying, and fasting. Here is the clincher. Two people can be standing side by side, going through the actions of worship, but one of those may not be worshipping at all. True worship arising from true faith comes down to the motive of the heart, and often that can't be discerned by merely looking at the external activity. You can give and not worship.

You can pray and fast and preach and serve and not worship. If you're simply caught up in the activity, if you're simply going through the motions, if you're simply doing it out of habit, or checking off the box, or attempting to convince yourself and others you are right with God, that is not worship.

True faith truly worships because those who love God love to express their love for God through worship activities like giving, praying, fasting, singing, serving, etc.

- I. How to Worship Wrongly
 - a. 6:1 is the heading for this section of Scripture and giving, praying, and fasting are the illustrations that Jesus uses to prove His point.
 - i. "your righteousness" is the equivalent to "exceeding righteousness."
 - ii. "practicing your righteousness" is referring to doing the good things that God's Word commands and calls us to do. It's the acts of worship we pursue as those who have been made righteous in Christ.
 - b. Jesus says, "Beware!" That means there is a wrong way to worship. False faith may look like worship and sound like worship because it's involved in worship-like activity, but it's not worship. Don't worship that way. False worship thinks that it pleases God because it's doing all the right things, but false worship will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven!
 - i. Now there are many blessings we miss out on when we worship wrongly, but the chief blessing, the chief reward that we are in danger of missing is entering the kingdom of heaven. (5:20).
 - ii. If we never truly worship God it's because we've never truly met God!
 - iii. As believers, we are sinners, and from time to time we won't worship rightly, we won't get it right all the time. However, the problem with false faith, it never worships rightly, it never gets it right.
 - c. So what is the issue? "before other people in order to be seen by them." Now Jesus is not condemning public worship. He's not saying it's wrong to give around others or pray around other or be around

other when you worship. The Bible commends corporate public worship. It's not wrong for us to receive the offering in public or pray over the offering in public today.

- i. Jesus pinpoints the issue with that phrase "in order to be seen by them." It comes down to motive. It comes down to the heart. It's not only what you do in worship, it's why you do what you do in worship!
 - ii. Do we give and pray and fast and sing and preach and serve to prove our faith to ourselves or to others? Do we practice our righteousness to build up the good side of our ledger? Do we go through the motions to earn God's favor and prove we are going to heaven? Are we trying to relieve our spouse, impress our girlfriend, appease our parents?
 - iii. Or, or, do we just love God and can't help but worship Him?
 - iv. Any other motive in worship is not worship.
- d. V2, v5, v7, v16
- i. False faith worships to be seen by others and to be praised by others. It has nothing to do with God even though it's engaged in an act meant to be to the glory of God.
 - ii. Being seen and being praised by men is the only reward of false faith worship – and what a poor reward it is. If all we have when we stand before God is the approval and praise of men, we have nothing!
 - iii. The praise and approval of men can vanish in an instant but the reward of the Father who is in heaven is forever!!

II. Right Worship is Radically God-centered

- a. Vv3-4, v6, vv17-18
- b. Right worship is radically God-centered. Again, Jesus is not teaching that we should never give or pray or fast around others. When He says do these things in secret, He's contrasting the false faith of the hypocrites who would never dream of doing these things in secret because then nobody would know or see! And that's their point, for others to know and see.
- c. True worship doesn't care who knows or sees. So true worship will worship at church and at home and in private because true worship is only concerned about loving God by doing these things.

- d. I believe that's the way to understand Jesus' teaching here because Jesus prayed in public.
 - i. When it comes to our giving, true worship is not about getting the praise of men, it's about cheerful, free, generous giving out of a heart of gratitude for all that God has given me! Freely we have received – freely we give! Our worship through giving is not foremost about the needs of others or the needs of the church, it's foremost about a rejoicing in all that God has graciously given us. For God so loved the world, that He gave!
 - ii. When it comes to our praying, true worship is not about getting recognition from others, it's about what we need from God! Prayer is a humble, solemn, thankful plea to God to provide what we need for life, salvation, faith, trials, temptations, serving the Lord, sharing the gospel. Prayer is demonstrating our absolute dependence on our Father to provide and His certain faithfulness to do so!
 - iii. When it comes to our fasting, true worship is not about showing others how holy we are is about acknowledging to God how sinful we are by denying ourselves in order to focus on Him!

III. Right Worship is Thoroughly Grounded in Faith

- a. V4, v6, v8, v18
- b. We worship because we love God. And we love God because He's so faithful and merciful and gracious and good and loving to His children.
- c. We believe in Him and in His promises and that's why we give and pray and fast and sing and preach and serve and share the good news.
- d. It's about faith in God, not the praise of others.

Conclusion – False faith boasts in not doing wrong (5:21-48) and in doing good (6:1-18), but because it's nothing more than a record of self-righteousness, false faith fails on not doing wrong and it fails on doing good. Exceeding righteousness fulfills the law of God from the heart by loving God and loving others. When we love others, we avoid the wrong, and when we love God, we worship Him in spirit and truth. We must beware when we practice our righteousness!