

Charitable Deeds and their Rewards

Matthew 6:1-4

Halifax: 18 April 2004

Introduction:

Today we come to a new section in the Sermon on the Mount.

- Back in 5:20, Jesus had surprised His hearers by telling them that they must have a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees!
 - This was a shocking statement because righteousness was the very thing the scribes and Pharisees were known for!
- Yet, we have seen in 5:19-48 how Jesus presents six gross misinterpretations of God's law that they taught.
 - And now in chapter 6, verses 1-18,
 - He is going to expose their hypocrisy in the one area they felt themselves to be most accomplished and were held in the highest esteem by the people...
 - Their religious deeds!
 - charitable giving
 - praying
 - and fasting.

The problem Jesus addresses here was not that they did not do these things...

- They were very diligent about all of them...
 - In fact, they were far more diligent than we are!
 - It was just expected that anyone who was numbered among God's people would regularly give to the poor, pray, and fast!
- To not do these things in that society would have been equivalent to purchasing slaves in our own.
 - A person who did not give alms, pray, and fast would have been ostracised.
 - But the Pharisees did these things more diligently than anyone!
 - In fact, these practices were their badge of honour!

The problem was not that they did not do these things, but the problem was in **how** they did them!

- When giving, praying and fasting are held in high honour by a society (which they should be)...
 - You can be sure that some people in that society will do these things to please men rather than God.

- They will give and pray and fast for men rather than for God.
- All along in the Sermon on the Mount, we have seen that Jesus is concerned about what His disciples are **before the face of the living God** who sees all things...
 - When He dealt with murder,
 - He reminded us that it is not just the outward act, but hatred in the heart that God sees.
 - When He dealt with adultery,
 - It was not just taking another man's wife, but looking on a woman with lustful eyes that He forbids.
 - And now, in this section, Jesus is putting His finger on the problem of doing all sorts of righteous deeds to gain the approval of man rather than God.
 - He assumes that His disciples were giving and praying and fasting,
 - but He is concerned about **how** they are doing these things.

Now this comes to us as somewhat of a rebuke in our society...

- We are not even good enough to be hypocrites in these areas!
- Our society doesn't value these things enough.
 - You get a lot more respect for the clothes you wear and the car you drive than you get for how much you give to the poor, or for how often you pray and fast.
 - But I do not mean to say that we are immune to religious hypocrisy either...
 - In the church, these things are still esteemed to a certain extent, and even in our society...
 - There is always danger for hypocrisy.

Today, I want to look particularly at the matter of charitable giving, the first of the three areas that Jesus addresses.

- And I would point out that this involves primarily giving money or goods to the needy,
 - But it also includes other deeds of kindness—caring for the sick or serving others in other ways.
 - Jesus is talking about all kinds of merciful acts.
- And if you look at Matthew 6:1-4 where Jesus addresses this,
 - You can see that...

I. Jesus tells you that you are to do your charitable acts with a view to obtaining a reward from God.

- A. That's right, His concern is clearly that you do things in such a way that you will obtain a reward from your Father in Heaven.
1. In verse 1, the problem with hypocrisy is that you will have no reward from your Father in Heaven...
 2. In verse 2, the problem is that you already have a reward from men rather than God.
 3. In verse 3-4, the motivation for secret giving is that the Father Himself will reward you openly.

TRANS> Clearly, Jesus is calling us to do our charitable deeds so that we will obtain God's reward.

B. Does this seem a little strange to you?

- We are conditioned by our society to think it a little strange to be motivated by reward in religion.
1. But it is not at all strange in the Scripture for God to commend us for doing things to obtain His reward...
 - a. Do you remember how Jesus told us to rejoice when we are persecuted for righteousness sake in the Beatitudes?
 - In Matthew 5:11-12, He said:
 - "Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven."
 - The reason He gives for rejoicing is because there is a great reward!
 - b. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul calls the Corinthian to pursue God's reward as a prize in a race. He says:
 - 1 Cor 9:24-26: Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain *it*. And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for* an imperishable *crown*.
 - c. In Hebrews 11, Moses is presented as a worthy example because he:
 - Heb 11:24: refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; **for he looked to the reward.**
 - His motive was the reward that he would obtain for serving God that was better than what Egypt could offer Him...

d. In Hebrews 12, even Jesus is presented as serving for reward:

- Hebrews 12:1-2 says:
 - let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, **who for the joy that was set before Him** endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
 - It was because of the joy that was set before Him, the promised reward, that He was willing to bear the cross.

TRANS> So you see then, that holding out a reward as a motivation to serve God is not at all alien to the Bible.

- If this seems a little wrong to you,
 - a little unworthy of what you would expect to find in the Bible—
 - perhaps it even makes you a little embarrassed about the Bible...
 - remember that the problem is not with the Bible, but with you.
 - Its not the Bible, but you who needs to change.
- 2. We have been influenced in our thinking by a humanistic morality that says it is wrong to do things for a reward.
 - a. Humanistic morality says this because it wants to take God out of the picture.
 - It wants to say that a person ought to serve just because it is the right thing to do, not in order to get a reward.
 - This teaching has often been illustrated by the story of a man travelling along with two buckets—one full of fire and the other full of water.
 - When people ask what he is doing, he replies...
 - “With the water, I am going to put out the fire of Hell...
 - And with the fire, I am going to burn up heaven.”
 - The idea is that he will serve his fellow man altruistically—
 - He will do good things, not for reward, but because he is good.
 - b. This all sounds very righteous,
 - but the real motive here is to make God seem irrelevant...
 - To make us think that we don’t need to worry about gaining His approval...
 - To make us think that He has no right to judge us with rewards and punishments.

- The humanists have been successful in weaving a distaste for serving for a reward into the very fabric of our thinking...
 - We are all affected by it!
 - But the truth is that those who believe in God continually respond to Him as the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.
 - And the Bible commends them for this as those who see God who is invisible to those who are blinded by sin.

TRANS> It sounds very pious to serve without respect to rewards,

- but in reality...

C. Serving without an eye to God's promised reward is the very problem that Jesus is addressing!

1. It is the problem of indifference as to what God thinks!
 - a. Here is a man, created by God and for God, living in God's world and provided with everything He has from God...
 - And yet He doesn't care what God thinks about him.
 - It is the height of rudeness and disrespect—it is the height of impiety!
 - b. It is the problem of looking to please man instead of God...
 - Looking for a reward of approval and acceptance from man rather than from God when God is the One to be honoured!
 - c. When this is done...
 - you are saying that man is more important than God...
 - you are saying that what other people think is what matters more than what God thinks.
 - God is taken out of the way!
 - d. Jesus calls you to come before the true God!
 - He is calling you to stop suppressing the truth about Him...
 - To see Him who is invisible and who is a rewarder of those that diligently see Him.
2. As God's children, you should want His reward more than anything else!
 - It is the reward, as Jesus says, of your Father in Heaven!
 - There are three reasons you ought to desire your Heavenly Father's reward above all else:

- a. First, you should want your heavenly Father's reward above all else because you love Him and want to please Him.
 - If a woman has an excellent husband, she takes pleasure in doing what pleases him!
 - The more she approves of and respect him, the more she wants to please him.
 - If you are a Christian, then you have seen something of the glory of your heavenly Father...
 - You have seen His great love that sent Jesus to die...
 - You have seen His power that called the world into existence...
 - You have seen His justice and equity...
 - You have seen His wisdom and grace...
 - You have seen that He is the end of all perfection.
 - As in Psalm 73, you say,
 - Ps 73:25-26: Whom have I in heaven *but You?* And *there is none* upon earth *that* I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; *But God is* the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
 - Obtaining His reward means that you have pleased Him, and there is nothing that you would rather do than that!
- b. Secondly, you should want your heavenly Father's reward above all else because you believe His judgement is perfect and excellent.
 - We want to be approved by those we esteem the most!
 - If you believe someone has the recipe for beautiful living, then you want to do things that that person would approve of!
 - You want to be accepted by them!
 - This is what makes a young man strong amidst peer pressure—
 - He esteems God's way to be better than the ways of the people around him.
- c. Thirdly, you should want your heavenly Father's reward above all else because you believe His reward is superior to all other rewards.
 - 1) His reward is superior because it is a reward that will last forever.
 - The applause of men can quickly change.
 - It can be there today in full strength and gone tomorrow.
 - The best politician is the one who was just elected!
 - The best employ is the one you just hired.

- But give it some time, and the applause will turn to criticism.

TRANS> Not only is God's reward superior because it lasts...

- 2) His reward is superior because it is a reward that truly satisfies!
 - a) God knows how to reward His servants with what will truly make them happy.
 - His is a reward that you will never grow tired of.
 - It is a reward that will fully satisfy you
 - b) Last week, I spoke to you about the inheritance God has promised us.
 - It is Himself—
 - We will be allowed to live before Him forever and to feast our eyes upon His majestic glory and perfection!
 - We will have His approval and His delight in us as His image.
 - No other reward can compare!
 - Moses made a wise decision when he choose to forsake the glories of Egypt and to suffer affliction with the people of God...
 - With the eye of faith He saw the reward that excels all others!
 - With all your heart, you should pursue God's reward when you do charitable deeds.

TRANS> The concern of Jesus in this section is that His disciples will not obtain God's reward when they carry out deeds of mercy.

II. What is it that keeps you from obtaining God's reward when you do charitable deeds?

A. Jesus says that it is when you do your deeds before men to be seen by them that you will have no reward from God.

1. Note well, He does not simply say that you lose your reward when you do your charitable deeds before men.
 - He says you lose your reward when you do your charitable deeds before men **to be seen by them.**
 - a. It all has to do with your motive.

- If you doing good deeds because you are trying to get people to notice you so they will honour you, you are wrong.
 - God sees this because God sees your heart.
 - He knows if you are serving with an eye to please Him, or with an eye to please your fellows... to be seen by them.
- b. But Matthew 5:16 makes it clear that you can even do good works to be seen by men for other reasons:
- It says,
 - Matt 5:16: "Let your light so shine before men, **that they may see your good works** and glorify your Father in heaven.
 - So don't misunderstand,
 - Jesus is not telling us that we are not to do good that people can see...
 - One of my daughters read these words in Matthew 6 a number of years ago and went around the house trying to hide everything she did in the way of serving others...
 - She would even stop doing a good deed when she heard us coming.
 - Recently, she told me about doing this and how I had rebuked her one night because she never seemed to do anything for others any more.
 - I did not know it, but she had just done something for me that very night in secret.
 - She did not tell me about it at that time,
 - but she realised that she needed to let her light shine and demonstrate her love to others.
 - By comparing Matthew 5:16 with Matthew 6, you can sort out what Jesus is saying...
 - You can see that it is your motive that He has in view.
 - In Matthew 6,
 - the goal is to be seen by men to gain acclaim and honour for yourself...
 - In Matthew 5:16,
 - the goal is to be seen by men to give glory and honour to God.

2. It all has to do with whom you are looking to get a reward from—whom are you trying to please.
 - a. The apostle Paul understands this same distinction when he talks about pleasing men...
 - In one place he says,
 - “If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ...”
 - In another place he calls us to
 - “Please all men in all things, even as I also please all men in all things.”
 - This is the way of an ideal employ at work...
 - His first business is to please the one who hired him, not to do what ever anyone who walks in the store wants...
 - If the customer want him to rearrange the store, he won’t think of doing it.
 - But it is also his business to please the customer in all things—he is there to serve.
 - If the customer wants him to find a product, he will do all he can.
 - b. Do you see how this works out in the practice of charitable deeds?
 - If someone is in need, you definitely want to please that person by giving them what they need.
 - But your ultimate reason for doing it is to please God.
3. It is clear that Jesus is talking about what you are aiming for because he says of those who aim to please men that they “already have their reward.”
 - a. This phrase, “have their reward,” is a commercial term...
 - It is what you stamp on a bill of sale when the customer has paid you...
 - “Paid in full.”
 - b. Jesus’ point is that the person who was aiming to please men was not really even thinking about pleasing God.
 - He doesn’t even think about God when he does his deed except in a very secondary way perhaps...
 - The main thing he is trying to get out of it is the praise of men.
 - Why then, should anyone expect God to reward such a man?
 - He did his good deed for a certain purpose—the praise of men—and that purpose has been achieved!

- He has received all he wanted.
- His problem is that he has pushed God out of his life and doesn't even think about pleasing Him or getting a reward from Him.

c. But now let's think about the person who sets out to please God.

1) He performs a good deed for his neighbour because he wants to please God.

- What happens if in performing the deed, he gets praise from men?
- Does that man he has already received his reward?

2) No, absolutely not!

- He has received a reward, but not the reward he was seeking.
- This fellow will not be "paid in full" until God rewards Him.
 - It is nice and he is glad that he pleased men, but he is not satisfied with only that...
 - He will only be satisfied if God is pleased with what he did.

TRANS> So you see that the way to lose your reward from God is simply to not look for His reward—

- to not do your deeds to please Him, but only to please others...
- to live without faith in the God who rewards those that diligently seek Him.

B. Another way some people lose their reward for their charitable deeds is by aiming to please themselves rather than God.

1. Of course, the person who is trying to please others and gain their acclaim is trying to please himself also, but that is not what I am talking about...

- I am talking about the person who does good to others because it makes him feel so good about himself!
- If you asked such a person if he had done a good deed in order to obtain a reward from God, he would passionately deny it!
 - "Oh no, I am not doing it for a reward at all!"
 - "I am doing it because it makes me happy and fulfilled to help other people."

2. Such a person has his reward....

- This person is not living to please God, but only to please himself!
 - He has admitted it!
 - Do you see what the point is?

- The point is that you ought to be aiming to please God and to obtaining His reward.
- The thing that keeps you from getting His reward is when you are looking to get your reward from some other source.

III. Jesus admonishes you to “take heed!”

- that is how this passage begins!

A. **Take heed** means that seeking praise from men is something you need to be wary of at all times...

1. “Take heed!”

- This is the language you use when you are in the jungle and there are wild beasts about...
- Or when you are on the road and there are robbers about...

2. “Take heed,” because seeking praise from men is a very subtle sin...

a. You can be doing things that appear to be the most selfless acts...

- acts that only a person that loves God would ever do...
 - but be doing these acts only because you want people to admire you!
 - When this is the case, the more you do, the worse you are!

1) If you make great sacrifices with an eye to please men, it only shows God how desperate you are to gain praise from someone other than Him!

- It shows that you are not satisfied with God’s smile,
 - but are like a seductress who leaves her husband to gain the approval of another man!
 - She will give up everything to get it!

2) When this is the case with you,

- All your zeal in serving and giving demonstrates nothing else but how full vanity you are—
 - how committed you are to the accolades of others!

3) But you must take heed because the very thing that is so full of vanity and selfishness **appears** to be loving and religious!

- Those who fall into this fall into a kind of blindness and self-deception...
 - They think they are serving God when in fact they are only serving themselves.

- Is there not something of this in all of us?
 - Take heed, because it is very subtle!
- b. It is also subtle because it has a way of sneaking up on you...
 - 1) You can start out with the best motives and intentions...
 - “I am going to do good deeds for the glory of God!”
 - 2) You can start out this way and then shift when people start to notice you.
 - It’s very easy to do—
 - You are serving the Lord well and you are being praised...
 - Then you start to get fond of the praise.
 - The next thing you know, you have taken your eyes off pleasing God and are living only for human praise!
 - It is a very subtle sin—it will sneak up on you if you don’t take heed!

TRANS> But there is also another reason to take heed...

3. “Take heed” because it is a very destructive sin!
 - a. It is as sin that corrupts our best deeds before God!
 - We have already seen that Jesus says there will be no reward for those who seek to please men—
 - no matter how sacrificial the deed may have been,
 - if it was not done to please God, it will not be rewarded.
 - b. Not only is the sin of seeking praise from men dangerous because it corrupts your best deeds...
 - It is also dangerous because it takes your heart away from God.
 - It won’t be long until you are doing things to please man that God has altogether forbidden!
 - You will lose touch with what pleases God because you are no longer focused on pleasing Him.
 - You will become an empty shell of a person who is alive on the outside, but dead on the inside...

B. Since this is such a subtle sin, how can you discover if you have a problem?

- Jesus tells you some things to check...

1. First of all, check to see if you have a trumpet!
 - Look at verse 2...
 - “Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do.”
 - a. When your real desire is to gain praise from men, you will find yourself always announcing your good deeds to others... with a loud trumpet blast!
 - 1) There is no evidence that the Pharisees really went around blowing trumpet before they gave alms...
 - 2) Jesus is using a very vivid figure here to catch your attention!
 - What could be more public than a trumpet!
 - We have the expression, toot your own horn!
 - You know what this is talking about!
 - b. You find all sorts of ways to draw attention to your good deeds when this is what you want!
 - 1) Some of these ways are quite obvious—
 - like those charities that post the names of all their donors in a newsletter...
 - or those churches that put your name on a plaque so everyone will know what you did.
 - This is often done because it makes the people want to give more—they get praise from men.
 - 2) Some ways of blowing the trumpet are less obvious...
 - You know,
 - when you perform your deeds in such a way that you leave a trail behind you so that others will discover what you have done.
 - Or when you sort of let it slip out in conversation about the good deed you did...
 - or about the great sacrifice you made—what you gave up in order to serve the Lord!
 - or about how you are so tired because of the service you rendered to your neighbour yesterday...
 - We can be very creative about letting people know.
 - 3) When this is always happening, it means you have a trumpet!
 - You need to put the trumpet away!

2. The next thing to ask yourself is “For whom are you performing?”
 - a. Jesus uses the word “hypocrite” here.
 - 1) This word speaks of the actors in the Greek plays.
 - Their job, of course, was to pretend that they were something they were not.
 - A hypocrite is one who only acts like he is serving God when he is really not.
 - 2) In the plays, hypocrites were also known as those who answered to the chorus.
 - As they were acting, the chorus would tell the story in song—
 - So the hypocrites would act in accordance with the song.
 - The hypocrites Jesus speaks of in Matthew 6 are those who answer to the chorus of men.
 - b. You can tell who your are performing for by looking to see whose applause satisfies you.
 - 1) If you are all frustrated because you didn’t get noticed or thanked or congratulated by men,
 - It shows you that you were performing for men!
 - You were looking for pay from men,
 - you wanted your reward from them but you didn’t get it.
 - It is as if God is completely out of the picture.
- TRANS> There is also a second indicator that you are performing for men...
- 2) If you find that the good things you do are things that get the most response from people...
 - or if you are even willing to compromise things you believe that make you less popular...
 - or to give up things that God has commanded because people don’t approve of them...
 - They whatever service you are doing to God is only pretend.
 - You are not answering to God in that case, but only to other people.
 3. The third thing you need to ask yourself is how much does my left hand know about what my right hand has done?

- a. Do you feel that you have done a great thing?
 - 1) Is it a big deal to you that you have done your duty to the poor or needy?
 - Then your left hand knows what your right hand did—you have an audience with you that is very impressed!
 - 2) Is it something you will remember for days to come and dwell on again and again so as to say, “What a good deed I have done?”
 - Then your left hand knows what your right hand did—your right hand is boasting about it to the left hand.
 - 3) If it is something that will make you reluctant to serve the next person “because after all, I did such and such...” as if you need not do any more?
 - If this is the case, then your left hand keeps on talking about it—over and over again.
 - 4) Do you get all irritated because you did not get thanked?
 - Your left hand is discussing what should have been done with your right hand and stirring you up to anger.

Take heed my brothers and sisters!

- It all comes back to what you are trying to do.
 - If you are trying to please God, then good.
 - If you are trying to please men only, then you have no reward from God.

If you are honest about this, you know that your motives are not pure.

- You know that too often, God is hardly in your thoughts at all when you perform a good deed.
- Too often, it is only done to please other people or to please yourself.

But remember, Jesus is presenting all these things to us in the Sermon on the Mount in order that we might become those who fit the description of the blessed person in the Beatitudes.

- The blessed person is poor in spirit—he sees his failings...
- He mourns because he sees his sin.
- He is meek because he wants God to govern His life
- He is hungering and thirsting for righteousness because he is not self-satisfied!

The people who are blessed in Jesus’ Kingdom are the ones who understand their need for a Saviour!

- A Saviour to die on the cross for the forgiveness of their sins...
- And a Saviour to give them a new heart and to transform them by His Spirit.

If you have never trusted in this Saviour, I urge you to do so now!

- The truth is that apart from Him, you can't even do charitable deeds that are acceptable to God!
- It is by trusting in Him that we are connected to Him and to all His saving benefits.
 - His blood to cleanse you from your sin and guilt...
 - and His Spirit to change your heart and restore you day after day into what God has called you to be.

And if you have trusted in Him, then let me urge you to look to Him all the more for His saving benefits!

- As we come to the Lord's Table,
 - He gives you bread to point you to His body that was given for you—to nourish you into the fullness of life...
 - And He gives you wine to point you to His blood that was shed for you—to cleanse you from all your guilt.
- It is by His grace that you will be able to do charitable deeds that please God.
 - Please stand, and let us call upon His name together now!