

In the Secret Place

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Well, it is a great delight to have you all with us here today as we open up God's word to allow the Lord to use his inspired word to speak to our lives as Christians, and also we trust that for those of you that do not know Christ, that it might prick your conscience and cause you to seek after Christ as God makes himself known through the teaching of his word here this morning, and not only making himself known but making known to us the kind of people that he would have us to be.

We're in Matthew 6 and as you turn there, I would just like to make a simple observation that is so much a part of our environment, it's kind of like a fish recognizing water around it, it's hard to separate yourself from your environment. We live in an age of marketing and self-promotion. Companies advertise. Actors have agents. Politicians have consultants and seek votes. Employees flatter their bosses with the hope of gaining an advantage and manipulate those around them to advance their own purposes. Athletes celebrate their good plays with dances and things that call attention to themselves. People dress, men and women both, to call attention to their appearances. The original tag-line for YouTube was "Broadcast Yourself." We, as a people, are fascinated with ourselves. Probably if the truth be known, speaking somewhat metaphorically, the favorite piece of furniture in most households throughout our country and throughout the Western society, at least, would be the mirror.

Over against that stands the sinless Son of God during his earthly life. What does Scripture say about him, the one who, of all people, would be rightly entitled to call attention to himself as the Creator of heaven and earth? "Hey, guys, you know what? I made your brains." What does Scripture say about him? Of Christ, it is written prophetically in Isaiah 53, "He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him." Philippians 2 says he did nothing from empty conceit. In John 8, Jesus said that he did not seek his own glory. He was the exact opposite. His very life, his very being, his very character is a rebuke to our present age, isn't it?

Well, it's that contrast, the spirit of our age in which we live and the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ whom we serve, that undergirds our passage as we move into Matthew 6. I may have said Matthew 5, we're actually moving into Matthew 6 here this morning, and we're going to introduce this chapter this morning with kind of an overview message

before we get into details, but in Matthew 6:1, we'll read through verse 6 and then we'll also skip over to verse 16 to kind of tie these themes together. This is kind of an introductory message to the whole chapter of Matthew.

Look at Matthew 6:1 where our Lord said,

1 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.

Skip over to verse 16.

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.

Now, we've spent the past several weeks, maybe even two or three months, I didn't calculate it, talking about Matthew 5 and Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:20 that "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus is giving a long and a very extended exposition of what righteousness looks like for his disciples, what the righteousness of his kingdom is like, what is the character of those who have repented and put their faith, what does a life of repentance look like, all of those terms describing the same general theme of the righteousness that marks the people of God.

You see, there is no such thing as a Christian who truly comes to Christ and then lives in the same way that he did before his conversion. We have a word for that, a term for that, and it's called false conversion; it's called self-deception; it's called not really being a Christian. Those that would say that, "I live this way. At a point in time I prayed a prayer and then nothing changed and I went on living the same way." The Bible knows nothing of that, of true Christianity, of those who truly belong. You see, the whole idea of Scripture is that men who are dead in sin need to be born again. They need new life from above and when God brings that life into a life, it changes them so that they are a new

creature, the old things have passed away, behold, new things have come. That's what true Christianity is and these that loudly proclaim, "Well, in the time past, I prayed a prayer and therefore I'm a Christian and don't talk to me about the sin in my life," that's not biblical Christianity. I realize it's done in the name of Christianity, but not everything done in the name of Christ is truly that which is of Christ. We need to be very clear about that.

And so, Jesus here in Matthew 5 and Matthew 6, talks about the kind of righteousness that starts to flow out of the life and out of the heart of those who are true Christians. So we saw in Matthew 5:21-48, he illustrated it in six different ways. Now without reviewing all of that, there was kind of a horizontal dimension to the righteousness that he talked about there: anger and lust and divorce and oaths and truth-telling and loving your enemies. There's kind of a horizontal human dimension to that. Well, as we come into Matthew 6, there is really no break in thought. Chapter titles, as we've said in the past, chapter titles were added to the Bible long after it was written. There is really no break in his thought, he is still expounding upon, our Lord is still describing to us, the kind of righteousness that he requires from his people. He is speaking in the imperative. He is commanding us. He says, "If you are my disciple, this is the kind of person that I command you to be." And we realize that there is a process of growth called sanctification, that we don't attain perfection all at once when we come to Christ, contrary to what some segments of Christianity would try to tell us. None of us reach perfection in this life. We also realize that these things that Christ calls us to are not deeds that we do that earn us merit before God that obligates him to let us into heaven. Scripture is very clear that you are saved by grace through faith, not by works, not of anything of yourselves. It is a pure gift of God and the righteousness that allows you to enter into heaven is only the righteousness of Christ. It is not any righteousness of your own, and it is through faith in Christ that you appropriate that righteousness so that you can be declared righteous by God and have all of the demands of the law met on your behalf.

So we're not talking about those things here today, as crucial as those are. Christ is talking to us about the kind of people that we are to become as we follow him in this life. And what does he say about this righteousness here as we move into Matthew 6? He's now starting to emphasize a vertical dimension; the aspect of things that we would do toward God; the things that would mark us as people of God, as those who love him and seek to walk with him; those things which are the means of grace that God uses to impart grace to our hearts and to help us grow spiritually: the reading of Scripture, praying, fasting and things of that sort.

This is what he's talking about now, and Christ here in our passage this morning is making a very very important statement that, again, is going to rebuke the very spirit of our age. Christ is saying here that as you do these things, as you walk in this way, you must understand that these acts of devotion are to be done with a vertical focus on God, to be done to please God rather than to have men notice them and congratulate you for your devotion to him. It's a very practical passage in that way. The idea of giving, praying and fasting, which are just illustrations of the greater point as we'll see, but the idea of doing these things which are supposed to be acts of worship to God, the idea of doing an

act of worship to God so that men will notice it and applaud you for it and praise you for it, is hypocrisy. It is wrong. It is sinful. It is something to be avoided and put to death.

So Christ kind of teaches on both sides here. He says, "Don't do these things to be noticed by men." He says, "In other words, or on the other hand, I should say, do these things in secret so that God sees them and that it's plain that you're doing them for the sake of worship toward him rather than for the applause of men." That's what he's addressing to us today and here in Matthew 6:1, which is our main text, our primary verse today, Jesus is laying forth the general principle, and then in the rest of Matthew 6:1-18 or verse 2 through 18, he uses giving and prayer and fasting to illustrate the greater point that he's making. He's not only talking about these three areas, he's talking about a whole mindset of walking with God that should define and shape the way that you live and the way that you think, and so we're going to introduce the theme this morning and then we'll pick the details up more in future weeks together.

Two parts to the message today as Jesus speaks, and there are two things that are going on we've got to be mindful of, and they just go right to the very heart of the reason that you live and the reason that you walk with God. Scripture is repeatedly – I think this is fair to say – that Scripture is repeatedly going to the heart of what defines you as a person. What are your highest aspirations? What are your deepest motivations? These things are not addressing us superficially, we shouldn't read these things and expect that, "Oh, this is just something for today." This is about what defines you as a person, what defines the reason that you live, that we're talking about. So as we come to God's word today, we open our heart at the deepest level, at the broadest level, and say, "Lord, search me. Help me. Change me. Make me into what you want me to be." In the deepest sense.

So as we come today, just trying to shape your expectations, that God's word would be addressing you at the most fundamental level of who you are and why you live. That's the sense that we're going after and it breaks down in two parts here today as Jesus does it. First of all, the first point would be: check your motives. Check your motives. Secondly, choose your reward. Check your motives and choose your reward, those are our two points here today and that's what Jesus is addressing at.

Now, if you've done any reading in psychology or sociology or any of those anthropologically oriented fields of study, you know how introspective and deep those things can be and it's just like sinking into quicksand and you say, "I want to get out of here!" and yet it just pulls you down more and more because of the deeply introspective and humanistic perspective that it brings to you. I see someone nodding in agreement with me. I'm glad you're identifying with that. That's very important. Christ's method of teaching is not like that. Christ has a way of speaking in clear, plain, simple language that defines things and in the simplicity of it, goes far deeper than anything else. The simplicity goes deep and that's what we're going to find here today.

So, point 1: check your motives. Let's look at Matthew 6:1 and get into the text now. Jesus says in Matthew 6:1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven."

Wow, is that verse really really important. Now, but I want to just connect things with you so that you see that this is part of a greater theme in the Sermon on the Mount.

Look at Matthew 5:6 just by way of reminder, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." And Jesus is describing what true righteousness is, what it is that a man or woman of God would hunger after, he's now describing that in verse 6. In verse 20 he says, "I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." Righteousness. He comes back to the theme, righteousness. In chapter 6, verse 1, "your righteousness." In chapter 6, verse 33, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." You see, when Christ saved you, he not only saved you out of sin, he delivered you into another realm where you would live out practical righteousness, not just in what you do but who you are inside. And that is the theme that he is expounding as we come to chapter 6, verse 1, and he opens up with a word that says, "Beware."

Beware. Now that word alone kind of wakes you up because what does the word "beware" mean except that it is alerting you to a danger. Beware of the dog. Well, you realize that that dog might bite your legs and so you're careful about where you go. You turn your attention to it so that you can protect yourself from danger, and Christ says, he's introducing with this word "beware," he's introducing a danger to your spiritual growth; a danger to your sanctification; a danger where you would otherwise fall short of the glory of God. And he says, "Wake up! Take notice of what I'm about to say." And in the original language, this is a present imperative which means that this is instruction that you are to take as the pattern of your life. This is something that you are to realize and to be conscious of on an ongoing basis, on a repeated basis. You are to be aware of this and to take heed, that this would be your characteristic approach to life. So Jesus here is shaping life character with what he's saying here.

And what is he doing here? Well, we can say it this way by way of overview: Jesus is warning you against parading your devotion. Beware of doing things that are ostensibly in the name of worshiping God when really what you're doing is trying to make yourself noticed by men so that they will praise you, and that ultimately you are doing these deeds of devotion not for the sake of God but for the sake of having someone stroke your pride. Jesus says, "Watch out for that unless you cheapen these means of grace into something that is simply for you to be praised by men." So he says, "Beware."

Look at verse 1 with me again, "Beware of practicing your righteousness," referring to, as we've already said, those deeds that express your devotion, your praise, your service to God. Jesus says, "Beware of practicing your righteousness," and then he adds the clinching phrase, the key phrase here. Look at it there with me in verse 1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them." A purpose clause. A purpose clause. And this word "noticed" is very interesting and it just lays forth the whole idea. This word "to be noticed" is a term from which we get our word "theater," the idea of acting, putting on an act before men so that they will notice you. Jesus says, "Beware of this and beware of practicing your righteousness to be noticed by men, of living as if

you were in a theater and you were the center of attention and the spotlight was on you, looking for the praise and the applause of your audience." Jesus is not criticizing the acts themselves, he's talking about your motive.

Look at verse 1 and I want you to see the pattern and the repetition that's in place throughout this whole section of Scripture. Verse 1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them." Verse 2, "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." To be noticed. To be honored by men. Look at verse 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." And in verse 16, the hypocrites, what do they do? "They neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting." Do you see the pattern? Jesus says, "What do hypocrites do? Well, they give in a way that calls attention to themselves. They pray in a way that calls attention to themselves. They fast in a way that calls attention to themselves. And they have little subtle tricks that they will do that will make sure that someone catches notice of what they're doing and the words of the praise of men will fall upon their ears and they can be satisfied by that."

Notice, Jesus is not criticizing in this passage, he's not criticizing acts of giving, acts of praying, acts of fasting. That's not his point because he goes on and he says, "Here is how you are to give. Here is how you are to pray. Here is how you are to fast." So the issue is not the acts themselves. That is so fundamental for you to see and to understand. The issue is your heart. The issue is that God is looking on your heart and is evaluating what is your motive for doing these things. Jesus says quite simply, "Don't do these things so that men will take notice of you and praise you for them."

And he says, "Don't be like the hypocrites," referring to the Pharisees. It would have been very difficult to have been a Pharisee listening to this sermon as Jesus excoriated every aspect of your life. But he calls them hypocrites and that's a term that originally referred to stage actors. The hypocrite, the actor in those days, they didn't have make-up so much as they used masks to put on their face to reflect the character that they were playing, and the hypocrite was one who hid his true identity and put on a mask. He practiced make-believe. He put on a display for his chosen audience. And what Jesus is saying is that when you practice your deeds of devotion, giving, praying, fasting, when you do that with the goal in mind of having people notice you and praise you, all you are doing is acting. You are a hypocrite. You are a stage actor playing to a human audience. It has nothing to do with true worship of God and so, he says, "Beware."

And the fact that he gives such an extended discourse at this point in the sermon, you know, dealing with this through 18 verses, tells us that, tells you this, I like to use the second person in my preaching a lot. It tells you this, beloved: you must understand, every one of you, you must understand that you are vulnerable to this kind of sin; that there is a love for the praise of man in your heart that makes you want to receive their praise in any way that you can get it whether that's what you do in church or what you do in other areas. The design is to play yourself and to put yourself out in a way that you are

the focus of attention and that men praise you, and what Jesus is saying is: understand that that sinful pride will seep in even into your most intimate acts of devotion with God. He says so be aware of it. Be on guard against it. Don't let yourself go there. This is a serious risk to spiritual health. So we see, all we've done and we'll cover all of this again in future weeks; we'll go over these things in greater detail. Just seeing the greater point, Jesus is saying, "Check your motives. Examine your heart. Ask yourself, 'Why am I doing what I am doing here as I pursue my devotion with God?'"

Now, secondly he says, "Choose your reward." Choose your reward and at this most fundamental level, beloved, at this searching juncture in the Sermon on the Mount, you have to decide what it is that you want out of life. What it is that you want out of life. Do you want the reward of God or do you want the reward of men? These are mutually exclusive pursuits and Jesus shows this contrast as he continues on in the sermon. He says that you can seek – this would be a subpoint here – you can seek the applause of men and people do that and people live that way, and I'm going to illustrate this in just a bit, but what I want you to see is that Jesus lays forth repeatedly in this passage the danger of living for the applause of men, for the praise and applause of your fellow man.

Look at what he says in verse 1 as he says, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." Notice that concept of reward here because now that is going to be evident in subsequent verses as well. Verse 2, he says, "Don't be like the hypocrites. They want to be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." Verse 5 about praying, to be seen by men. Verse 5 he says, "Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." And even in verse 16, you see the repetition. Verse 16 he says, "These men who fast to be noticed by men, truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." The repetition, beloved, helps you see what Jesus' point is. It tells you what his emphasis is. The repetition brings your attention and says, "Think about this." It's as if at this point in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is putting blinders around your eyes so that you will focus on this one particular thing. Rather than seeing everything around, the repetition says, "Think about the reward that lies on the other side of these things." That's the idea. The repetition says, "This is what you're to think about. You are to be choosing your reward as you go through life. What is it that you're after? What do you want out of life?" Because the motivation is going to shape your pursuits.

And this term "reward in full," very interesting. One writer says this who examined ancient writings of the Near East, he said this and I quote, "This term, 'reward in full,' this is a technical expression regularly employed in drawing up a receipt. When Jesus says, 'They have received their reward in full,' it is as though they had already been given a receipt. They have absolutely no further claim to reward." In other words, you give something and you get a receipt showing that you've paid for it, you got what you paid for. What Jesus is saying is that when these hypocrites pray and fast and give so that men will notice them and congratulate them and praise them for their godliness, when the hypocrites do that and they put these things on display and a man says, "Wow, you're really godly!" says to the woman, "There is such godliness in your life," and the person, the hypocrite, soaks that in and says, "Oh yes, I like that!" What Jesus is saying is that

when that happens, here's your receipt. You have what you paid for. You got what you wanted. That praise is your full reward for that devotion. That's all you're going to get. You are paid in full for it. You wanted the praise of men, you got it, go on your way, showing that it is now something that had nothing to do with serving God with devotion to Christ, with any thought of future reward from Christ for it. What you wanted was for men to praise you. They praised you. Go your way. You have what you wanted.

Beloved, when Jesus says you have what you wanted, he's saying that's as good as it's going to get for you. Don't you think that that is going to seem awfully empty when you stand before Christ at the judgment seat, the Bema seat, and he rewards his people for their lives? And isn't it going to seem awfully empty for that so-called Christian who lived his life seeking the praise of men deep in his heart, and when it comes to Christ passing out eternal rewards, to find that you had squandered most of it for the cheap, tawdry, passing praise of men? That's going to be a miserable day for a lot of people to realize how much was forfeited because of the motive with which they did it. When Christ hands out rewards and, in essence, tells you, "You've already got yours. You got what you wanted back there."

Let's bring this to some practical illustrations and some practical considerations, multiplied illustrations here. When you are praying with other people, watch yourself that you're not more eloquent when you have an audience listening to you than you are when you're praying in private. We all know what that's like. We all know that we can turn on the fireworks if someone else is listening to us pray, right? And yet doing that while in private, maybe you're not even praying or when you do it's short and stiff, that's an illustration of what Christ is talking about here. How can it be that we can turn up the spirituality when someone is listening? It doesn't make any sense unless we're simply doing it so that people will think about us as a good prayer.

If you desire to teach, God bless you. The Bible says that if anyone aspires after the office of an elder, it's a fine work that he desires to seek. The desire itself is not wrong but what you have to be careful about, and even those that are teaching have to be careful about, is that you need to make sure that you are teaching so that your audience is edified rather than that you would be standing in front of someone and be seen as the teacher. "Oh, you're the teacher." You like the position that it gives you before men. This is greatly searching but this is where Christ goes with it.

For those of you that are on social media, think twice about posting that picture of your open Bible with the steaming cup of coffee and your pen next to your notebook saying, "I'm sitting down for my devotions with God." Think twice before you do that. Actually, just don't do that. Don't do that in order to see how many "likes" and "wows" you can get out of your social media audience. These things get real practical, don't they? The nature of the way that we can express that sinful nature of our pride has changed. There was no Facebook in Jesus' day, of course, but it's just an outlet that gives opportunity for us to do this. I don't mind people saying spiritual things on Facebook. The idea is that people not do that which would praise you for being someone godly by virtue of what you've put out yourself. Don't be your own agent in declaring how righteous you are. That's not good.

Christ says that that's hypocrisy. Christ says that that's done for the praise of man and when you realize that these things are to be done as sincere acts of devotion to please a holy God, all of a sudden you realize how ugly that kind of thing is.

I can say it this way. The guy is not in the room and so we can say this without targeting anyone by what's said. Don't be the guy who visited the very first formative meeting that led to Truth Community Church over five years ago. Don't be this guy whom I met, who went out of his way to come up to me after I had spoken and he said, it's funny looking back on it. He said, "I'm related to So-and-so Prominent Pastor." A lot of you would know who I'm speaking about if I mentioned the name. It was a local pastor. "I'm related to So-and-so Prominent Teacher in this area and I led," he said this, he said, "I led 23 men to Christ in my last message." I was overly gracious. I just smiled at him. Now what I wish I had said is, I wish I had looked at him in the eye and said, "That's weird." "What do you mean that's weird?" "It's weird that with no relational context, when you've met me for the first time, that you would so put yourself forward in a manner like that. That's weird. It's weird that you would make yourself look godly to someone that you've never met in such a way as that." But I'm usually not that forward. Sometimes I wish I was.

Don't be like that, beloved. Don't brag on yourself. Don't put yourself out and say, "I'm doing this for Christ and look at my devotions and see this picture of me praying," or whatever, because all of that stuff Christ condemns and says, "Don't do these things to be noticed by men." And beloved, it is not simply, it is not simply a matter of sinning in the present against Christ who commands us not to do these things, beloved, for your own well-being don't use up your time and your effort to just get a passing reward from men whose breath is in their nostrils. Why do we even care what men think about us when there is a holy beneficent God looking down on us, examining our hearts, and saying, "Do these things with an eye toward me so that I can reward you"? Why on earth would we care what men think when the eye of God is upon us?

So the idea is to choose your reward and to be aware of the fact that it's very easy to just seek the applause of men and to recognize that there is eternal significance with what we're doing with these things. I think that it would be good for Christian organizations to tear down their displays of the donors to their organization. I don't think that's good to just put that and parade it on display like that. What is this except for people to read it and to give acknowledgment, public acknowledgment to it? Why do we need to do that? Why isn't it enough for the Lord to provide and for us to give him thanks without putting it on display? Why is that except that it motivates those who like praise to give more. We might do better with less that's done to the glory of God.

Now, with that said, thinking about the full Sermon on the Mount, what Jesus is saying here, "Beware of doing these things to be noticed by men," it might seem contrary if you think about it. It might seem contrary to another part of Jesus' teaching elsewhere in Matthew 5. Look at verse 16 with me. If you've never thought about this, it is a perplexing question when it first occurs to you. Earlier in the sermon, Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Wow. This just seems like there might be a direct

contradiction here. On the one hand he says, "Do it so men will see it," and on the other hand he says, "Don't do it so men will see it and notice it." What's the explanation of that? Well, there is perfect harmony in this teaching when you understand that in Matthew 5:16, Jesus is addressing a completely different matter and if you just read it in context, it becomes very clear.

Look in verse 15 of Matthew 5, or verse 14, he says, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house." Jesus is talking here in Matthew 5 about an unnatural desire to hide your light so that men will not see it and Jesus says, "Don't do that." He's talking about two completely different things, even though it seems like there is a similarity to what's going on. In Matthew 5, what he is saying is this, he's saying, "Don't be a coward with an artificial suppression of your testimony. Don't be a coward that hides your devotion to Christ for men to see." In Matthew 6, he's talking about a completely different threat to your spiritual life as shown by the separation of thought, Matthew 5:16 to Matthew 6. In Matthew 6, he's saying, "Don't be a hypocrite that puts on an artificial display of your devotion."

The whole idea, beloved, is this: forget about yourself. Forget about yourself. Forget about the way men are noticing you and just walk through life with a sincere integrity, being who you are in the place and the circumstance that God has given to you, and let God do with that as he may. Sometimes men will notice that. It's not that you're trying to actively suppress men from seeing you, that's not the point. You're not trying to hide the light. If that was the fact, I wouldn't preach. If the idea was to never be seen by men, how could we ever teach the word of God to an audience? That's a foolish twisting of the whole idea. No, in Matthew 6, Jesus is addressing something different. You can go out of your way to hide yourself, Jesus in Matthew 6 now is saying, "Don't go out of your way to put yourself on display, to make yourself known." So that's the way that you understand those two things. He's talking about two completely different points there.

Now, beloved, there's a different reward to seek. We talked about the applause of men, all the different ways that we can see, all the different ways that it just oozes out of the sin that remains in our hearts. What you want to do is you want to stop that ooze from coming out of your life. There is a different reward to seek. It is counter-cultural. It is contrary to the whole idea of self-promotion, of athletes dancing and everything that I said at the start, that whole mindset of broadcasting myself. Jesus calls us to something that is completely separate from anything the world does and anything that the world would understand and endorse. He calls us to live our lives for the approval of God. For the approval of our Master. And this will liberate you from the bondage of pleasing men when you see what he has to say here.

Go back to Matthew 6. We've seen how he talks about the hypocrites to be seen by men, now he injects throughout this passage, he injects a contrast that shows the difference, that shows what he is after, a contrast that is sharp, a contrast that is clear. So in Matthew 6:3, you can see it here, he says, "But." Do you see the contrast, "But"? The hypocrites do this but you do this. Verse 3, "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand

know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." Look at verse 6, "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." Verse 18, let's just make it verse 17. We'll average them out. We'll meet in the middle here. Verse 17, "you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face 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." You should approach these things as though cloaking them with secrecy, so that men cannot see them. And this is the way that you mortify, put to death, in other words, that desire to have the praise of men. You do these things deliberately in a manner that men cannot see them, therefore they cannot know about them and, therefore they cannot applaud you for them and, therefore you can't do it to receive their applause. You do it in a way that guarantees that men will not applaud you for them, is what Jesus is saying.

And the most unsanctified person might say, "Well, then why am I doing it? Then what's the point?" Well, you see, the whole idea is that we understand that we are living a life under the seeing eye of our heavenly Father who is loving and gracious and faithful to us. Jesus says here that, "Your Father sees these things and your Father will reward you for them." And so all of a sudden rather than a horizontal, visible applause that you get, that you're seeking, Jesus says, "Turn your back on that. Reject that. Repent of it and give yourself over to a life of private devotion to God that you know that he sees and have this inner sanctuary that belongs to him and to him alone." And Jesus says, Jesus gives his promise that when you live that way, your Father will reward you. Your Father will bless you in ways that you cannot fathom. Seek the approval of God even if men don't notice.

So, you look for ways. Sometimes it's hard as a mom or, you know, you're living in a crowded situation, hard to find these places, but you calculate the way that you go about praying and these other things. You calculate it in a way that says, "I want to be someplace where no one knows what I'm doing. I want to be in a realm that only God sees," and have that sanctifying influence work its way through your life.

Now, beloved, I said that these things are immensely liberating and let me illustrate for you and just help you see what that means. It's profound and it draws us to love our Christ and to love our heavenly Father all the more when we view it from this perspective that I'm about to say. For the faithful believer who is consistently overlooked by men, for the stay-at-home mom keeping house, watching kids, raising kids, no one to congratulate her, for the lonely widow who thinks she has too much time on her hands and wonders why the Lord leaves her here on earth, to people like that and a thousand others like them, this passage comes to us and gives us encouragement, gives us a reason to carry on that is noble, that is glorious, that God promises to bless. It's here, beloved, where you look to Christ and find your encouragement and remember this: that our heavenly Father sees the things that men do not see. Our heavenly Father sees your faithfulness that no one else sees. And as you carry that out, knowing that you're not doing it for the applause of men and maybe even circumstances make it impossible for men to see and praise you, all the better then. All the better then, to know that a loving, gracious, heavenly Father

sees and never forgets. A loving, gracious, heavenly Father sees and says, "That pleases me greatly. I will reward you. I will bless you greatly for that." And all of a sudden rather than being drawn toward the tawdry praise and passing compliments of men, we start to see the grandeur of God in stark display. We start to see the glory of God and the worth of his reward far greater, infinitely better than anything that men could say to us and you orient your whole life toward that.

And beloved, it's not just individual acts a few minutes of a day. Beloved, you may have the opportunity to orient your whole life this way with the career that you choose, with the way that you live your life, with the people that you choose to associate with. This goes everywhere. Giving, praying and fasting are just illustrations of the greater point. Live your life, Christ says, for the reward of God, to please him, rather than situating yourself so that men will notice and praise you.

As you move away from the applause of men to the approval of your heavenly Father, what's going to happen? I'll tell you what's going to happen: you will have greater intimacy with Christ. You will have greater assurance of your salvation. You will have a more abundant reward when you see Christ face-to-face. I don't know what that's going to be like so I'm just speaking in metaphors with what I'm about to say but somehow there is some kind of dimension to what I'm about to say, that when the believer who has lived his life for the approval of God stands before Christ, in some manner there will be some kind of spirit of environment of that that says, "Ah yes, I remember all of those times that we spent alone together when no one else was around, that no one else knew about. Ah, my child, welcome. Enter into the joy of your Master. Your reward is great." That's why we live this way. You see, we understand from Scripture, we see from Christ, that there is a greater life coming, that there is an eternity ahead with him and we gear our lives and our motives and everything looking to that great final reward, despising the passing praise of men for the sake of the smile of our Savior.

So what is it for you, beloved? Is it the applause of men or the approval of God, the approval of Christ who loved you and gave himself up for you? Which will it be?

Our Father, give us eyes and affections only for thee. Let us learn to despise the praise of men as that which we would seek and give ourselves wholly over to you. And Father, for those under the sound of my voice who orient themselves this way, I ask you to be faithful to that glorious promise of Scripture, that you would reward them, and not only reward them, Father, but reward them exceeding, abundantly beyond all that they could ask or think. Shape our hearts. Shape our lives. Shape our thinking. Bring these things deep to our hearts and deep to our minds that we would orient ourselves toward Christ in our lives and be indifferent to the passing praise of men. If it comes, great. If it doesn't, who cares? As long as you see us, Father, as long as we walk with you, as long as you will reward us, Father, that is all that we seek. Now helps us to change where we need to change and strengthen the hearts of those who serve you in obscurity, Father. May the promise of Christ who can never lie, who could never fail, who could never deceive us, when Christ says, "You will have your reward with your heavenly Father," Father, let

that be the promise that sustains us and strengthens us and gives us joy as we leave this place. In the name of our Savior we pray. Amen.