

Radiant Church, February 21, 2016
Mike Rydman

A Disciple's Heart...Doesn't Try to be Impressive
Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18

As we begin this new section in the Sermon on the Mount, let's review what we have already been...

Jesus begins the sermon in **Matthew 5:1-12** with the **Beatitudes**. These are the eight distinguishing marks or recognizable traits of a true child of God.

In the second section, **Matthew 5:13-16**, Jesus teaches the two identity metaphors of **Salt and Light**. Here he explains the positive affects his disciples will have on the world.

In the third section, **Matthew 5:17-48**, Jesus reveals the **radically righteous life** that he calls his disciples to. He does this by re-interpreting six Old Testament commands.

Now in **Matthew 6:1-19** we come to the fourth section, here Jesus talks about the motivations behind our spiritual disciplines. In these verses, Jesus explains the proper way to give, to pray and to fast.

But, we have to start with two prevailing principles that run throughout this passage:

God is our Father → therefore we are secure. Only when we feel insecure do we then look for our security from other people. We will then end up unreal in our religious activities, because we have no real relationship with God.

Jesus reserved His harshest criticisms for the Pharisees, the Priests, the Scribes, the religious leaders - because they had convinced the people that God was not a Father as much as He was a capricious Being, to be feared, therefore placated through their own efforts. In a way, Jesus was accusing them of blasphemy

God our Father sees everything → everything we do is in His presence, because we are in relationship with Him. Only when we feel like He doesn't see everything do we find ourselves motivated to be seen by others

Therefore, a disciple's heart...doesn't try to be impressive!

I have to warn you, some theologians have called this one of the hardest chapters in the entire Bible; it's like holding up a mirror to our own faces.

Q? Have you ever given food or money to someone holding a cardboard sign at an intersection? What did your self talk sound like? Have you ever prayed out

loud during a meeting? What was your inner dialogue? Have you ever done an extended fast from food or electronics? What were you thinking as you explained it to a friend?

Have you ever used Facebook or Twitter to promote something good you did for someone else?

We will not run to Jesus until we have truly seen ourselves for what we are.

Matthew 6:1 *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 now relates back to the first Beatitude: “Blessed are the Poor in Spirit” Like Pascal once said, “Man is great insofar as he is wretched”

None of us completely meets the standard of the Sermon on the Mount, but as believers something of the character of the Kingdom will be authentically present in our lives, a presence of the surpassing righteousness of Jesus.

This first verse is also the main point of the entire passage.

This is an absolute. This is also the overriding danger statement.

Jesus then gives two illustrations of what He means for us to understand:

Matthew 6:2-4 *Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

A “hypocrite” finds its root meaning in the word for “actor”

Playing a role other than who the actor really is

Playing a role to impress the audience

Our society likes published subscriber lists and bronze plaques, rooms or even buildings named for major donors, photos taken with crippled children. Our politicians like to have their names included on a successful and well-received bill.

To have already received their “reward” means they got praise and admiration from people...and sadly, even for Christians that may be the real goal for anything good we do.

What’s the right way to give or do any act of mercy? Don’t let others know about it. The “left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing” means

don't even make a big deal of it, even to ourselves - meaning, don't give yourself a pat on the back for how humble you are or what you do.

We must not try to keep the spiritual ledger, the account - God does that.

Guiding principles:

1. A true believer gives and serves to please God - not for man's approval
2. Our lives are to be marked by uncalculating generosity. If we give to others in order to be affirmed, we're not really "giving" at all; we're "buying," buying people's applause
3. And when serving others, our eyes need to be on the one's we are serving, not the observers
4. It's not wrong to seek rewards. Marrying a woman for her money is acting like a mercenary. But the natural reward for love is marriage, and that does not make the groom a mercenary

I am learning that confessing and asking for God's forgiveness of my "good works" is harder than confessing and asking for God to forgive my "sin."

Matthew 6:5-8 *And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

Do we pray out loud to be in conversation with God? Or is it performance art?

God is not against public prayer, only the prayer that is reserved for public, to be noticed and admired.

Can we be guilty of praying differently in public than we do in secret? Have you ever planned what you will say before praying out loud? (I have.)

James Montgomery Boice, the great preacher from Philadelphia once told his congregation, "I believe that not one prayer in a hundred of those that fill our churches on a Sunday morning is actually made to Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are made to men or to the praying one himself, and that includes the prayers of preachers as well as those of the members of the congregation."

Matthew 6:16-18 *And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your*

head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

This is again about practicing our spiritual disciplines in secret, not to be seen. It's also pointing to how we can sometimes try to "out spiritualize" each other, hoping our godliness will be impressive.

How often do we try to impress people with how hard we're working, how much ministry is a stress, how sacrificial we are?

If and when you do "fast," which is intended to deny ourselves of something (food, distractions) it is so we can be more in tune with the Holy Spirit in prayer.

But fasting is not intended to "force God's hand" in answering our prayers. Because again, that is not giving something away, it is trying to buy off God.

In other words, we fast and pray, not so God will hear us, but so we will hear God. Big difference.

In these verses Jesus is saying; be careful as you live your Christian life, that your motivation is not to impress people, ultimately to be impressed with ourselves. Be honest about yourself. Pay attention to your motivations. Don't be a hypocrite.

Instead, keep your spiritual disciplines a secret. Try to keep it a secret even from yourself. When you give, don't pay attention to your self-congratulating-self talk.

When you pray, disappear somewhere. Get alone, so that you won't be tempted to impress someone with your "spirituality." And, speak to God simply. Don't try to impress or manipulate him with fancy talk, He already knows what you need. And this fits for both private and public prayer.

When you fast or deny yourself of something, forget that you are. Don't dwell on it or advertise it. When a self-affirming thought pops into your head, reject it and redirect your praise to God.

1. Which of your "spiritual" activities breed self-righteous thoughts?
2. When was the last time you sprinkled a few details into a conversation to impress someone with your level of spirituality?
3. What could you do to keep your mind off of yourself today?

We cannot change by trying to run away from our self-serving motivations. We have to find a higher and more compelling motivation

We are called to find our highest joy in Jesus

If you have never considered your self-congratulating “self-talk” before, ask the Holy Spirit to tune your attention to the motivation in your heart. Ask the Spirit to help you forget yourself and direct all praise to God.

Praise Jesus because he is the only one who hasn’t patted himself on the back.

Thank him for always forgetting himself. Even his last breath was motivated by love for us, and for his Father.

Thank God that one day, all self-congratulating talk will be gone.

If you are thinking, “busted, guilty, I hate my self-affirming pious behavior,” ask the Holy Spirit to do the impossible.

Ask Him to change your heart so that you can forget about yourself and empower you with a pure heart.

Thank Jesus for paying for your self- congratulating thoughts on the cross.

Praise Him because his good works were pure from the heart level.

Thank God for his patience with you.

Praise God for his wondrous works, he alone is worthy of all praise.

Tell God you look forward to the day when your heart will be incapable of self-congratulating talk and all glory will go to him.