

Blind Benevolence
Matthew 6:1-4

Please turn in your Bible's to Matthew 6. When Jesus began his public ministry, He began simply and powerfully with the good news, with the gospel saying In Matthew 4:17, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" Repentance is the first word of the gospel, the turning from our sin and turning to Christ for salvation. As we began our study in the Sermon on the Mount, we noted that while the crowds and Jewish religious leaders are present, it is to those that have already turned to Jesus as savior and as Lord, those that are Jesus' disciples, already in a pre-crucifixion and pre-resurrection way, in union with Christ. It is to followers of Jesus that Jesus is directing His teaching.

We're transitioning in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount from looking at the heart, the internal change of life from walking with Christ, to what the heart produces externally as a result of following Christ. In Matthew 5:20, Jesus says, "*For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*" What Jesus wants us to understand as Christians and followers of His is that **righteousness is an inside out transformation that begins with union with Christ**. Each of the six examples Jesus gave of as correctives to the teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees in chapter 5, which we've been looking at for the last several weeks, have all been correctives dealing with what goes on in the heart and not with the external action itself. But Christianity and being a disciples and follower of Jesus Christ does have outward implications. And so chapters 6 and 7 are going to look at the **practical applications that are a part of our lives because of our union with Christ**.

Three areas of practical application will be addressed: **Public Religious Life (6:1-18); Personal Interior Life (6:19-24); and Interpersonal Relational Life (7:1-12)**. Today we're going to begin looking at the first area of application – public religious life. Jesus begins with a warning that will carry through the entire section. He says in verse 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.*" Before we move on I need to define a term so we know what Jesus is talking about. When Jesus warns of "practicing your righteousness" what he is speaking about are what we would call **spiritual disciplines**. Spiritual disciplines are practices found in the Bible that promote spiritual growth. Things like bible reading, worship, meditation, tithing – giving regularly of your income to the ministry of your local church, as well as giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting which are the examples that Jesus uses here in Matthew 6.

There's a key principal Jesus will bring us back to over and over as He talks to us about our public religious life. And the principal is this: **practice spiritual disciplines for God's audience; not man's**. Five observations to make about Jesus' key principal here. Jesus says, "*Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people to be seen by them*". This reminds us that our **public religious life is solely to impress God alone**. Impressing God not to demand from Him, but impressing God understanding that He is the audience and no one else. Second, we're to beware of practicing spiritual disciplines, our righteousness, in order to be seen by others. Jesus will speak about doing things in secret. So there is a **call to secrecy, but secrecy does not prohibit public action**. Jesus will repeat in the three examples he will give, that we are to do these acts of righteousness, these spiritual disciplines in secret, only for the audience of our heavenly Father.

The third thing to notice is that **Jesus is demanding practice, not merely theory**. "*Beware of practicing your righteousness...*" To easily we can get up in talking about acts of righteousness, of spiritual disciplines and all the right and wrong ways that they should be carried out; read books about spiritual disciplines, and do Bible studies, but never actually get around to practicing them. Jesus expects and assumes practice – not merely theory.

Fourth, practicing acts of righteousness in secret, for the audience of the Heavenly Father alone, **brings the promise of eternal reward for pleasing God rather than men.** We'll talk more about some of these rewards in a moment.

The fifth observation to make about the key principal; practice spiritual disciplines for God's audience; not others, is that the three examples Jesus gives are **random examples, so secrecy applies to any spiritual disciplines.** Jesus is giving us three examples, but there are more, he doesn't mention memorizing scripture, but that is a spiritual discipline, doesn't mention fellowship with other believers, but that too is a spiritual discipline. The point is no spiritual discipline, no act of righteousness, should be done for the audience of man; God alone if we want to have God's rewards, is to be our audience.

So let's turn to the first act of righteousness, the first example of a spiritual discipline Jesus gives. Jesus says in verse 2, *"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."*

Jesus addresses the spiritual discipline, the act of righteousness, of giving money to the poor; what I'll call benevolent giving. Before we look specifically at what Jesus says, I want to commend you as my church family for your generosity in giving to our benevolence fund. We are blessed with a strong benevolence fund, a fund which is financed separately from our general fund. When you give each week during our regular time of offering, those gifts go to the general fund, and are separate from our benevolence fund. The benevolence fund exists because of you who give gifts to the church beyond your regular giving, and we use our benevolence fund to assist those who have financial needs within the church, as well as those from the community at large that might need help to meet rent, pay a bill, or put food on their table. I bring this up, because this does show that many in our church share God's heart for the poor, and those dealing with financial difficulties in their lives. God does have a heart for the poor, and calls His people share that same heart. Psalm 41:1 says, *"Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him"*. Proverbs 19:17 teaches us that, *"Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and He will repay him for his deed"*. When a rich man comes to Jesus seeking to earn his salvation from his good works Jesus says in Matthew 19:21, *"If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me"*. God has a heart for the poor, and uses His people to help in alleviating some of the burden that the poor live under. So benevolent giving is a spiritual discipline that is to be a mark of Christian discipleship and following after Jesus.

Again Jesus says, *"When you give"*, this is **an assumed activity** among Jesus' followers. The question is not whether a follower of Christ will practice benevolent giving but how they are to practice it. And Jesus immediately moves to the how; the actions that are not to characterize our practice of this spiritual discipline and the actions that are.

Jesus says, in verse 2, when you give, *"... sound no trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the Synagogues and in the streets"*. A lot of ink has been spilled on exactly what Jesus means about sounding a trumpet in the Synagogue or in the streets – but the point is crystal clear and I'll borrow an idiom from our own time; **don't toot your own horn.** This is what the hypocrites do, hypocrites play a part and speak words for effect but not to convey truth.

And the reason Jesus says that our spiritual disciplines should not be done for public acclaim, here our benevolent giving for others to see. Because when we seek man's praise for a spiritual discipline, we will indeed receive our reward in full. What Jesus is saying is, **man's praise is a finite reward.** If you want man to praise you, you'll be able to get it, but that's all you'll get. And Jesus wants more for His follower, wants more from us as we practice

our spiritual disciplines, wants us to know the fullness that God has for us in practicing spiritual disciplines in this life.

Verse 3, “*But when you give to the needy*”, again notice the assumed activity here, “...*when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing*”. Jesus is setting up an illogical or comical activity here, but simply saying, **motive matters**. We need to be aware, as best we can, of what our motive is when we give. On June 4, we’ll be taking an offering at the end of the service for our benevolence fund. We do this almost every time we have communion. And if you choose to participate at that time, you’ll be able to give using the app, which allows for quite a bit of secrecy that honors Jesus’ point, but you may choose to give a check or cash that day as you exit. Jesus’ point isn’t that you should make that giving secretly ridiculous, but rather, what is the motive of your heart as you give. Is it to be seen, or is it to benefit those who are in need. One is honoring to the Lord, the other seeks the recognition of men. We need to be honest with our motives, and seek to bring our motives in line with God’s desires and God’s heart.

Why should we do this, why should our practice of benevolent giving be done in such a way that God is our only audience? Verse 4, “*And your father who sees in secret will reward you.*” I’m going to look at some of the rewards that come from benevolent giving with a godly attitude in just a moment. But I want to point out something else first. You might be uncomfortable with the thought of doing a spiritual discipline for the reward God will give. You might be thinking, if I’m not to practice my acts of righteousness for the reward of men, couldn’t I just as easily practice spiritual disciplines to seek to manipulate God, shouldn’t I just do them expecting and wanting no reward in return? Maybe, but I find that kind of thinking in line with the kind of thinking that says everyone deserves a trophy simply because they played. No they don’t competition should be adequately rewarded with being declared the victor. You see, to banish rewards and punishments from the idea of religion is in effect to say that injustice gets the last word. It cannot be reasonably held that the pompous man and the arrogant man are one in the same. All this to say, that God rewards the good, godly motives of His people is to say in a broader cosmic sense, **justice will be done**. God does see, God sees what is done for everyone else to see, and God sees what is done in secret for the praise of His glory.

So what are some of the rewards that can come from benevolent giving? I believe one reward is **growth in discipleship and sanctification; as we looked at least week, becoming like my Father**. God’s heart is for the poor, certainly those who are poor materially, but also for those who are poor spiritually. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who recognize their spiritual poverty. As we seek, through our union by grace alone through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, to be like our heavenly Father, we are rewarded when we are like him with growth as a disciple a follower in Christ and growth in our sanctification, becoming more like our gracious God.

A second reward God gives as we give benevolently to those who are less fortunate than we are is **development of gratitude for what God has given me**. When I give to another less fortunate than me, I find that my perspective begins to change about my own situation, wants, and needs. God grants a perspective that all I have is His, that He has indeed blessed and met my needs, and that a thankful heart for those blessings is something that needs to continue to be nurtured. When I can give to the poor gratitude for God’s faithfulness and giving can grow as a reward in my heart as well.

A third reward God can give is a **satisfaction that God uses what I have**. Most of us want to be able to be used by God. Benevolent giving may very well be that vehicle for some of you. The Bible says that we are the hands and feet of Christ, that when we extend the cup of water to another, to the least of these, we are doing so as if to Jesus Himself.

And finally, closely related to this third reward is a **humility that can come realizing that what I have can be used to benefit another**. It is profoundly humbling to look at something that we may think is no big deal, giving a few dollars to someone who is in need, and realizing that that could be an action that would bring encouragement,

could be the very help needed to get someone over the hump, could be a simple act that brings generational change to someone's life or family. God gives grace to the humble that Bible says, and a reward from your heavenly Father as you practice the assumed spiritual discipline of benevolent giving, giving to the poor, is the humility that God used you to make a difference for someone else.

The practice of spiritual disciplines is an important part of our being a follower, a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are assumed practices within the life of a Christian, and are pleasing to God only because of our union with Christ through faith. We reflect the generosity and grace of our heavenly Father as we give generous and graciously to those who are in need. May we be found faithful in giving to others and receiving God's rewards for service done to bring Him glory and praise alone.