

## SEEKING THE RIGHT KIND OF REWARD:

### MATTHEW 6:1-18

6 of 12, *Jesus on the Good Life: The Sermon on the Mount*

1. C.S. Lewis in “The Weight of Glory”: what makes an act mercenary?
  - There is a kind of reward that is not naturally bound up with the action: marry a girl for her money.
  - Another kind of reward is the natural consummation of an action: marry a girl to be with her for life.
  - The issue is *not* whether or not we should seek a reward (we should!) but the kind of reward.
  - Getting this issue right settles the orientation of our desires.
2. In 5:20, Jesus spoke of a greater righteousness; 5:21-48 exemplifies it in our ethical practices.
3. Now, 6:1-18 exemplifies it in our piety; almsgiving, prayer, fasting were pillars of Judaism.

#### **I. The Main Command: Beware of Desiring Man’s Approval (v. 1).**

1. “Beware”: command to be on guard, to exercise vigilance, to see the threat from a distance.
2. Beware of what? Practicing righteousness before others? No (see 5:16).
  - Issue is not being seen by others when doing good (as if no one can ever know you give, pray, fast).
  - Issue is your motive: practicing your righteousness before others *in order to be seen by them...*
  - Watch out for the subtle temptation of making your religious practices more about you than God.
3. Why? You will forfeit the only reward that matters: God’s approval; you are to seek this.
4. Jesus gives three examples. In each case:
  - (1) Warning not to perform an action for man’s approval.
  - (2) Assurance that those who do will have *only* what they seek and no more.
  - (3) Instruction on how to perform the action rightly.
  - (4) Assurance that the one who obeys will have a true reward from God.

#### **II. Application to Giving (vv. 2-4).**

1. Warning (2a): Don’t give alms like the hypocrites do.
  - “When you give” assumes his disciples will. Synagogues had funds for public welfare.
  - “sound no trumpet before you”; was this actually practiced? Probably hyperbolic.
  - Nevertheless, it is not hard to imagine that givers had ways of drawing attention.
  - Why are ostentatious givers “hypocrites”? Pretend to serve God, but actually themselves; self-deceived
2. Assurance (2b): those who give that way have their full reward: man’s approval, *not God’s!*
3. Instruction (3-4a):
  - Far from giving to be seen by others, don’t let your left hand know!
  - What does this mean? Let generosity be ingrained into your life so that you forget about doing it.
  - If you do not give regularly (to the church, to ministries), it will take practice; make it a habit.
4. Assurance (4b): What is the reward? God’s approval, both now and in the age to come.
5. How does this teaching apply to us (in addition to the obvious)?
  - Don’t give to others for your sake (so they will know I care), but for their sake (because it is helpful).
  - Example: Church member in the hospital may not need more visitors, but may need rest.
  - Churches and institutions: Care more about the mission than the brand.
  - Example: Cornerstone planters may become revitalizing pastors instead; can we affirm that?
  - In all of the work you do (giving your time, your energy), ask: Am I serving God or man?

#### **III. Application to Prayer (vv. 5-15).**

1. Warning (5a): Don’t pray like the hypocrites.
  - “When you pray” assumes his disciples will pray.
  - How do hypocrites pray? Main issue not posture (standing) or location (synagogues or street corners).
  - Issue is motive: “...they *love stand up and pray...that they may be praised by others.*”
  - Prayer is not about communing with God for them; it is about appearances.
2. Assurance (5b): They may impress others, but God is not pleased with their prayers.
3. Instruction (6a): How should we pray?

- “go into your room”; inner room (storeroom, bedroom, etc.; private location).
- “shut the door”; obtain even greater privacy
- “pray to your Father who is in secret”; God is inescapable (Psalm 139:7-10); near to us.
- “your Father”; the “your” is singular, moving the theocratic OT idea to personal, relational level.
- 4. Assurance (6b): you will have God’s approval and blessing over you.
- 5. How does this teaching apply today?
  - If you pray more in public than in private, that’s a problem.
  - If you praise God intensely on Sunday mornings but rarely otherwise, that’s a problem.
  - Caveat: public prayer (even carefully prepared) is not bad; the issue is motive (leading vs. impressing).
- 6. Additional warning and instruction in vv. 7-15 (next lesson); prayer can be simple.

#### **IV. Application to Fasting (vv. 16-18).**

1. Warning (16a): Don’t fast like the hypocrites.
    - What is fasting? Going without food (or certain kinds of foods) for a limited time to intensify prayer.
    - “When you fast”: assumes Jesus’ disciples will fast; however, there is a shift (9:14-17).
    - How do hypocrites fast? They make it a public display for the sake of others; appearance.
  2. Assurance (16b): Man may be impressed, but not God.
  3. Instruction (17-18a): Fast for God, not for others; in most cases, they shouldn’t even know.
  4. Assurance (18b): You will have God’s approval; fasting will serve its purpose to intensify prayer.
  5. How does this teaching apply today?
    - What about Lent? If I wore ashes on my head all day, I would be tempted to take pride in appearances.
    - If you are always eager for people to know how you sacrifice to serve God, check your heart.
    - “Admire my self-discipline/extraordinary devotion/service to God in difficult circumstances.”
    - Corporate fasting is not ruled out here; the early church practiced it (Acts 13:1-3).
1. Jesus does not say, “Kill your desire”; he says, “Elevate it.”
  2. We can have man’s favor if we want, but we will degrade our pious practices by seeking it.
  3. Ask one question: Does this please God? Nothing else matters.