

Secrecy is the Secret
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
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May 30, 2021

Text: Matthew 6:1-7, 16-18

Purpose: As followers of God and believers in Jesus Christ, we want everything we do to be pleasing unto God. Especially the things that demonstrate our dedication to God – like giving, praying, and fasting. During Jesus day, and even for some people today, some hyper-religious individuals want to not only receive applause from God for their good pious deeds, they want the applause and adoration from others.

There once was a religious farmer who lost his Bible out in the field one day.

A few days later he went to answer a noise at his door. Standing there was one of his cows, with the farmer's Bible in its mouth!



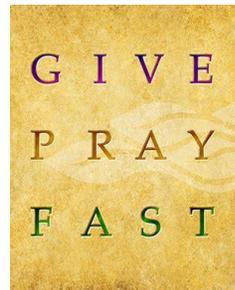
The farmer was so excited to have his Bible back that he raised his eyes to heaven and thanked the Lord for this miracle.

The cow said, “It not really a miracle, your name was written on the inside.”

Today we turn our attention back to the Book of Matthew. Over the past year, we have been working our way through this first Gospel. Today we come to a chapter that talks about the inner (secret) motives which govern



our external acts of righteousness. Last week we looked at the inward obedience to the intent of the Law. Not just externally being obedient, but also our inward thought life should be obedient as well. Today we are examining three areas which Jesus focuses on for our continued inward walk with God. He gives attention to three areas in which we demonstrate our devotion back to God – giving of alms (money), prayer, and fasting.



As we looked at chapter five several weeks ago, we saw that Jesus spoke about the kind of righteousness His followers needed to *possess*. If you look back at chapter five, you will see it began with the Beatitudes. We are to be poor in spirit, meek, hunger and thirst for righteousness, be merciful towards others, pure in heart, be a peacemaker, and even be willing to be persecuted and suffer for our faith.



In chapter five, Jesus focused in on the inner thought life and our actions as they relate to the Ten Commandments. You shall not look on another with hatred in your heart, if you do, it is like murder. You shall not look at a woman lustfully, if you do, it is like adultery. Jesus did not avoid topics like divorce, swearing and taking oaths, and going the extra mile when compelled to do so. Jesus addressed

the need to *possess* these qualities if we are to be citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Chapter six turns the corner and begins to focus on the *practice* of faith. The daily working out of our faith. He looks at our motives behind what we do and emphasizes that what motivates us is more important than what we actually do. It is really all about attitude.

As we practice our faith, we sometimes get caught up in what others may think about us – and forget all of our actions need to be directed towards God. As we exercise our faith, it is really a matter between you and God – no one else. One day we will stand before God and have to give an account of our actions, words, and deeds. No one else will be called up to defend us. It will be just you and God. If we get this right now, then when we stand before God, it will go right then.



The Motive and Method of Giving

The first item Jesus mentions in chapter six goes right to the heart of our motives – the use of our money.



“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

Many individuals are willing to give money to a project if they can get recognition for their contribution. There is a church that I know of that raises a substantial amount of money to pay off their debt through an annual auction. During this auction, people donate items to be sold and some individuals prepare their specialty cakes. When time for the auction comes, some individuals show how important they are by purchasing one of those special cakes for as much as \$500. The cake is probably worth \$20, but they want to show off among their peers so others will think highly of them. One of the participants would often proudly share how much they paid for the cake. The whole town would be buzzing the next week about how much was paid for that chocolate cake!

J. Vernon McGee relates that one day he was asked to raise money for a certain cause. He was to ask everyone that would give at least \$100 to raise their hands. He was surprised at this fundraising technique and asked why. He was told there were individuals that would only give \$1 if they did not have an opportunity to be recognized for giving. By asking for a contribution in this manner, they could be assured of maximizing the fundraising opportunity.

In Jesus' day, the Pharisees would give alms (money) away to the poor. When it came time for the distribution, a trumpet would be sounded and all the poor would come and line up. All the onlookers would come out to see who was the generous person giving money away that day.



Jesus instructed His believers to not give in this manner. If you give, give it secretly. If possible, do not even let your right and left hand know what the other is doing. Giving should come as an outflowing of our dedication to God, not out of seeking any recognition from giving. Maybe what Jesus was trying to tell us about not letting our right and left hand know what the other was doing so we would not become so prideful.

Giving back to God and others should be done in the least recognized manner. No fanfare or parades – simply a gift from the heart.

If you want to raise funds to build a large building, you put the name of the most generous donor on the front of the building, etched in stone. I have seen this done at Campbell time and time again. When they built the new Chapel, they named it after the donor. When a special program is offered, it is named after someone that gave to support the event. When Vidant added a new building years ago, the name of the significant donor was listed on the side of the building. Jesus would say to the individual that if they gave for recognitions sake; then “You have received your reward from men. You don’t need My reward.”



I believe I will wait to get my reward from the Lord instead of getting it now. I will take what is behind heaven's door instead of receiving applause from people now. ***Secrecy is the secret to heaven's reward.***

The Marks of Genuine Prayer

A second *practice* of faith involves prayer. Jesus said this concerning prayer:

“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”



When Jesus addressed the topic of prayer, He attacked the practice of the religious leaders of making their prayer life public. In Jesus’ day, I am sure the pious leaders would stand up and speak beautiful flowery prayers to impress the listeners. I have even heard people in churches pray in this manner – trying to impress others with their flowery language and beautiful tasting words. In Jesus’s day, they thought so much of their prayer skills that they took it out into the streets.

Before Israel was under tremendous conflict and war as they are today, if you were to go to the Western Wall of the Temple Mount, you would find hundreds of faithful Jews praying day and night. Some would be praying quietly, while others would be making a public display of their religious sincerity. I am sure once the conflict is over, they will resume their daily prayers at the Western Wall.



Jesus is telling us that prayer is something that should come from the heart and it should be done between you and God.

Prayer is talking with God and listening to God. It takes time to prayer. We need to take time to spend with God in prayer – praying and listening.

Jesus goes on to say, *“And when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”*



If you pause and consider what Jesus is teaching here, it is revolutionary! Did you notice Jesus referred to God as Father? As citizens of the Kingdom of God we are invited into a family relationship where God is our Father and we are children of God. John 1:12 says, *“But as many as receive Him, to them He gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.”*

If you search the Old Testament, you will not find a reference to an individual relating to God as Father. You will find the nation of Israel called God’s son, but not an individual relating to God in this kind of close family relationship. Jesus is speaking about a new kind of relationship. We can come to God as our Heavenly Father and speak to Him in that manner.

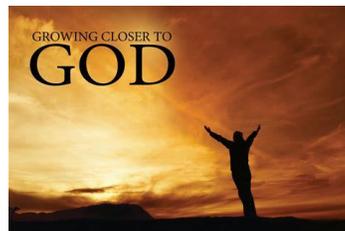
Our prayer to God needs to be that kind of intimacy. Not one that involves vain repetitions. I have heard people pray repeating the same phrase over and over and over. Many faiths around the world feel as if through the repeating of a petition or prayer that somehow, after a while, their god will wake up from a



long sleep and finally hear them. We serve a God that is our Father. And our Father hears us when we pray. He may not answer the way we want in the time frame we wish, but He hears.

Jesus reminds His followers, “*Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask.*” Jesus is not saying to stop praying. He is simply saying God is keenly aware of your situation. He needs us to pray and leave the details to Him. Trust Him. God already knows your situation – health, finances, family relationships, business problems, insurance situations, employment situations, your children’s issues – God knows it all and is ready to meet our needs in accordance with His plans for our life. The secret is secrecy. ***Secrecy is the secret to heaven’s reward.***

We are called to meet God in that secret place to pray. Our reward may not be the answer we desire, but the reward is actually being in a relationship with a living, listening God. Our situation with employment, family, relationships, finances, health, or business may not change, but our walk with God will grow closer. Knowing God in prayer is our reward. God rewards – but only in that secret place you two meet.



The power of prayer is in growing closer to God. The reward of prayer is knowing our Heavenly Father. So many people talk about prayer, but don’t pray. So many people talk about wanting a closer walk with God, but don’t take the time away from the demands of simply living to get to know God. The invitation to prayer is always open – if we only turn to Him.

You may have noticed I have skipped the section concerning the Lord’s Prayer. (Matthew 6:8-15) The disciples saw the power Jesus exhibited. They came to understand the key was in the close connection with God through prayer. In order to have time to reveal what Jesus is teaching in this special model prayer, we will begin delving into that over the month of June.

The Meaning of Fasting

After our Lord touched on the subject of giving money to the poor and praying, both of which should be done in secret, there was one more topic Jesus wanted to address. That was fasting.



In Jesus’ day, fasting was a part of the regular routine of spiritual life. Some people that would fast regularly wanted all the other people to know how spiritual they were. Imagine living your spiritual life so publicly that you wore special clothes in public as you prayed and you had trumpets accompany you when you gave money to the poor. If you had that kind of mindset, surely you would do something to draw attention to the fact you were fasting.

Some would disfigure their faces, maybe put ashes on their head and add special clothes to add to their piety. Their faith was demonstrated outwardly. Jesus is calling His followers to do exactly the opposite.



Jesus said, *“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face. So that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”*

According to Jewish practice there were five or six fasts each year. But many Pharisees kept two fasts each week - on Thursday and on Monday the days that Moses ascended and descended Mount Sinai. It was their opinion that fasting helped discipline the flesh and drew them closer to holiness.

Like many other disciplines, they started out good, but over time they lost their true meaning to ritual. It would appear this was true for the Pharisees.

Jesus on the other hand is rarely seen observing this ritual of fasting. At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus fasted for 40 days. But other than that, it is rarely mentioned that Jesus fasted.

When one of the religious leaders questioned Jesus, He responded by saying, *“While the Bridegroom is present, you don’t fast.”* (Mark 2:19)

Jesus is instructing His followers when they fast, not that they are required to do it at certain times, but when they do, it is should be done secretly. Fasting does have value if it is done to draw our focus away from the flesh and towards a



more spiritual walk with God. Fasting should not be a drudgery; rather one should go about their regular days activities and not draw attention to their fast.

Many people have written about fasting. Some people fast one day a week. Some fast from one or two items. During the season of Lent, many people will use that time to fast from something. Some may completely give up one item – like soft drinks. Some fast from food but drink water to keep hydrated. Many faiths utilize fasting. The Muslim fast called Ramadan began April 12th and continued until May 11th this year. During this time, they do not eat or drink anything during the day, but feast at night.

I know of a Christian that that fasted for 40 days, only drinking water. He said that time of fasting was when he was closest to God. I would only suggest if you were going to do that kind of extended fast, speak to your doctor first. I believe there could even be some health benefits from fasting occasionally.

First and foremost, if you choose to fast, it should be something that is between you and God.

A dark, semi-transparent rectangular box with white text. The text reads: "My fast is a matter between God and myself." The background of the box is a blurred image of a landscape with trees and a sky.

I guess if Jesus were here today, He would say “Don’t tweet about how much you gave to the poor. Don’t post your prayers on your daily Blog. Don’t post on Facebook you are doing a fast.”

Our reward is from God. In order not to lose our reward for our gifts, prayers, and fasting, we need to humbly walk with God – not proudly before our peers. We need to give in such a manner that God is honored, needs are met among

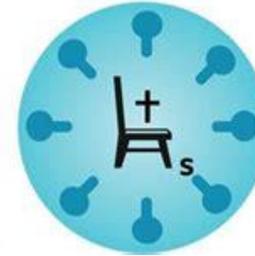
the poor with us, but not for selfish prideful recognition. We need to pray. When we do, it needs to be done in the quiet places of our home – not publicly in the street – demonstrating our holiness to a skeptical world. When we fast, we need to wash our face, put on our regular clothes, go about our daily activities – not drawing attention from others about our devotion through fasting.

Jesus is turning the outward religious expression of faith inward. It is in the heart we find our truest obedience. Our attitude needs an adjustment FROM selfishness, attention seeking, and outward religious legalism TO generosity, humility, and forgiveness and grace.

In these passages in Matthew, Jesus is comparing the self-directed life to the Christ-directed life. Before we close this morning, let us examine what the characteristics are of both. In a self-directed life we seek to put ourselves on the throne of our life.

Christ-Directed Life

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness



- Life is Christ-centered
- Empowered by Holy Spirit
- Introduces others to Christ
- Has effective prayer life
- Understands God's Word
- Trusts God
- Obeys God

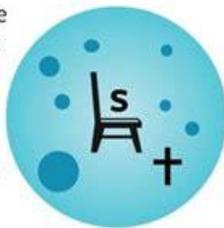
Have you arrived? I am still a long way from where I need to be. It is my desire to live in such a way that Christ is at the center of all that I do. May we seek to grow inwardly closer to God and increase our reward from our Heavenly Father. I am coming to understand our reward is not just reserved for us in heaven, but rather it is a reward of God's presence in our lives right now.

If you have not yielded your life over to God, today can be the day to make that change.

LET US PRAY

Self-Directed Life

- Legalistic attitude
- Impure thoughts
- Jealousy
- Guilt
- Worry
- Discouragement
- Critical spirit
- Frustration



- Aimlessness
- Fear
- Ignorance of spiritual heritage
- Unbelief
- Disobedience
- Loss of love for God and others
- Poor prayer life
- No desire for Bible Study

If we remove ourselves from the throne of our life and place Christ at the center, our lives will revolve around the things of God. Our lives will begin to demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit.