



PLEASANT RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH

The Sermon on the Mount - Part 2 • Giving in Secret •

Matthew 6:1-4 • 08/05/2018

Main Point

As followers of Jesus, we should live only for the Father's approval in our giving, rather than for our own self-righteousness or reward.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Would you describe yourself as a people pleaser? How do you know?

What's the difference between simply doing a good job and being a people pleaser? When does that attitude become wrong?

Whether we identify ourselves as people pleasers or not, we all have areas of our lives where we want to impress others. In which area of your life is this temptation the strongest? Why do you think that is?

Motives are the intentions of our hearts. At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explained what kingdom attitudes look like. Those attitudes should reflect an understanding of his/her need for God's grace. In terms of giving, the Christian isn't generous in order to impress others, but only gives for the Father's approval.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 6:1.

Jesus directed His harshest words at the religious elite of Israel. He identified in them the sin of doing right things for wrong reasons. As they attempted to live up to their own standards, the Pharisees lost sight of their personal walk with God. Their motivations deserved Jesus' contempt.

How were the people Jesus described practicing their righteousness? What did that kind of practice reveal about these people's hearts?

When we obey God for our own selfish reasons, how do you think He reacts?

Is it possible to be completely pure in your motives? Why or why not?

How can understanding our motivation for the good things we do drive us back to the gospel?

When we're motivated to obey God because of who He is, not who we want people to think we are, then what we do becomes about serving God and the people He puts in our lives. Self-righteousness doesn't have a place in the lives of kingdom people, because we know we don't gain God's approval by doing the right things. Instead, we should serve God out of love for Him and humbly, because He loves us.

How does knowing your need for grace impact the way you act around or toward others?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 6:2-4.

The first example Jesus gives to illustrate the right and wrong way to practice righteousness is giving. Giving, along with praying, forgiving, and fasting, was considered to be an act of spiritual devotion to God.

Read Deuteronomy 15:11 and Proverbs 14:31. Why does God expect His kingdom people to be givers?

Jesus' statement in Matthew 6:2, "when you give," assumes that giving and caring for others are natural parts of being disciples. The same phrase is repeated in verses 5 and 16 in regards to prayer and fasting. The specific type of giving Jesus referenced in these verses was "alms-giving," or giving gifts of money to the poor, but His teaching also applies to giving of time, talents, and so forth.

What are some selfish reasons we're motivated to serve the poor? How do these motives compare with the ones Jesus desires us to have?

How did Jesus describe "hypocrites" in these verses? What are their motives for giving?

Jesus taught that the Pharisees were only acting a part or hiding behind a disguise of religious piety. Hypocrisy is a matter of doing right acts from wrong motives thereby achieving the wrong goals. Jesus knew the motive for acts of righteousness by those who were hypocrites had deteriorated to become nothing more than to be seen. The hypocrites simply wanted to be recognized and honored as religious superstars. All this misguided effort produced a worthless result. The hypocrites received the people's acclaim, but they missed the reward from their Father in heaven.

What do you think Jesus meant by the phrase "don't sound a trumpet"? What might be some modern-day equivalents to sounding a trumpet when giving?

What does it mean to not let the left hand know what the right hand is doing?

The instructions about the left hand and the right hand (vv. 3-4) prohibit a person from celebrating his/her own acts of righteousness. When you give, remember that nothing you have comes from your accomplishments. All that you own is given to you by God. By giving in private, you eliminate the temptation to take the praise for yourself.

What criteria can we use to make sure we are giving for the right reasons?

How does giving impact you on a spiritual level? What type of “reward” do you think God gives those who obey His commands to give to the poor?

Jesus’ remedy to avoid hypocrisy in giving is to give in secret. Secrecy mitigates the mixed motives of guilt or duty or prestige sought in giving. Confidentiality assures that the need is met while the temptation toward prideful praise is avoided. Discreet giving, as Jesus taught, is a beautiful expression of faith. Such giving trusts that God knows and rewards the giver. It becomes a true offering to the Lord that seeks to please Him alone.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How should God’s ultimate gift to us—Jesus Christ, His Son—compel us to give to and serve the poor? What can you do to keep this truth in your thoughts this week?

If God is the One who gives us everything we have, what role do we play in giving?

What are some practical ways that we can serve the poor in our community this week, with the goal of sharing the gospel?

Pray

Pray that God would continually remind your group that giving to the poor is something God commands us to do, but that it is to be done with the sole purpose of glorifying Him. Also pray that our stewardship would ultimately glorify God and bring others into His kingdom.

Commentary

MATTHEW 6:1-4

Matthew 6:1 serves as an introduction to all of 6:1-18. It establishes the theme of doing acts of righteousness before men, and thus losing reward from your Father in heaven. Jesus' exhortation Beware of is the present tense form and emphasizes the need to be on the alert to the temptation to seek our reward from men. Jesus was not condemning the righteous acts themselves. His concern was the motivation behind the actions. The same act of obedience can be right or wrong, depending on why a person does the act. Jesus has already commanded us, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father who is in heaven" (5:16). The difference is in whom others see as a result of our public righteousness. Do they see only us, or do they see our Father more clearly?

The opening when (v. 2) implies that this was a teaching which applied to any instance of giving. Jesus began by telling His hearers not to give alms, ascribing such ostentatious behavior to the hypocrites (referring to the scribes and Pharisees of 5:20). Key to the passage is the explanation of their motive: to be honored by men. In this first example, Matthew uses a verb meaning praise (5:16), whereas in the second and third examples, he uses another verb meaning "to make visible" (active), "to be seen" (passive). The meanings of the words overlap, but the concern is the tendency toward competition with God for glory.

“Giving” or “almsgiving” is the translation of terms meaning “perform an act of mercy.” By the first century, the phrase came to mean specifically the act of giving to the needy. This kind of giving was not mandatory in Scripture, for it was above and beyond the three required tithes. God’s people are not to give to draw attention to themselves. In classical Greek, the term hypocrite referred to an actor on stage, wearing a mask. In the New Testament, it came to have a negative connotation, referring to someone putting on an act (i.e., masking the truth). Jewish rabbis taught that almsgiving received especially high reward. How empty to know that, due to one’s own pride, there was no reward remaining for an act of righteousness beyond the glory of the moment. This was shocking to a first-century Jewish audience.

Verse 3 begins with the strong adversative, But when you. The emphasis on “you” was intended to draw a stark contrast between the hypocrites just described and Jesus’ kingdom servants, the disciples of 5:1-2. Jesus’ instruction in 6:3 is exaggerated wording intended to make the point: “Do all you can to avoid drawing attention to yourself.” Since nothing escapes the eye of God, even the most private act is noticed and will be rewarded. Jesus’ use of the title Father added warmth to His guarantee of reward. This is not to be seen as a mechanical kind of relationship. Rather, the gift from the heart is given out of love for the Father, and the reward is returned as to a dearly beloved Son.

The reward (6:4,6,18) is not unrelated to the concept of reward in 6:1. The first word leans more toward the idea of repayment; thus, the idea of reimbursement for our “expense” incurred in each act of righteousness. But the point is the Father rewarding His servants. We were “created ... to do good works” (Eph. 2:10). In keeping with the instruction of 5:16 to “let your light shine,” our Father in heaven will reward us for good works. The issue for the Pharisees was works apart from God’s righteousness. The Pharisees were trying to establish their own righteousness by works.