

Reading: Matthew 6:1-18

Theme: Secret Giving.

Can you imagine what it would have been like to have heard Jesus teach the Sermon on the Mount or to have heard Him speak the Beatitudes, showing what the members of His kingdom are to be like? He went on to show the interaction between society and the Christian, then the Christian and the relationship to the law of God and He corrected the false teaching and ideas of the Pharisees. It must have been amazing to hear such things. Jesus did not stop there, but He moved on to correct and contrast what was being practised by the Pharisees in their religious life - giving, prayer and fasting are all used as illustrations and examples of religious life (v1-18) and then in v19-34 He deals with the Christian's day by day life in general.

We are to realise that all areas of our lives are to be lived aware of being in our heavenly Father's presence at all times - whether we are involved in specifically religious things or in the ordinary things and situations of life. For those of us who belong to Christ, we are to have no little compartments to label and keep separate as "spiritual" or "ordinary". We are to be natural in our spiritual things, and spiritual in natural things; we are to consciously and actively live all our life in the presence of our God. That means all our religious duties are carried out aware He sees and knows our motives as well as our actions; so also with our ordinary lives. It is incredible our heavenly Father loves and cares for us so much and the truth of God as our Father is emphasised and mentioned 12 times throughout this chapter.

What a lovely picture to comfort and encourage us, that the great God of heaven, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, cares for people like us - not only in our spiritual lives, but in our everyday lives, with all our concerns and worries, ups and downs in every aspect of our lives. This is further emphasised as we realise that the King, the Lord Jesus, takes time to tell and teach us concerning these matters. The Lord Jesus knew we needed instructions about both the spiritual and natural areas of life; we need to be clear about our religious and ordinary lives. A Christian is not someone who knows no problems or difficulties. Some Christians give the wrong impression, even the wrong teaching that when you become a Christian all your problems are packed away and all will be sunshine and happiness. Yet that is not so. We are in a world which would oppose God and His people, we have desires that would go against the right way of living for God.

Being a Christian does not remove us or isolate us from the ordinary cares and pressures of society and there are also pitfalls and difficulties in our Christian life. In His love and wisdom, the Lord Jesus teaches us how to work out the righteousness that is to exceed the Pharisees on a practical, nitty-gritty level. There could have been those who listened to the 1st part of the Sermon on the Mount and thought *“Great - and inward righteousness, not show and pomp as the Pharisees teach. I can have an inward holiness and purity and it doesn’t need to show in being meticulous and disciplined.”*

The Lord Jesus goes on to say that our righteousness must show itself outwardly in doing righteous deeds, called *“acts of righteousness”* in v1. I want us to look at the 1st 4 verses of

this chapter to see what Jesus is teaching here in the area of giving to those in need.

1. Right Motives Are Needed.

The Lord Jesus emphasises the need for right motives - not only in giving to the needy, but in our praying and fasting, indeed in all things that we do. It seems, v1 is a general principle that is illustrated and enlarged upon in the 3 areas that Jesus deals with – giving (*almsgiving*), praying and fasting. Matthew Henry wrote “*Almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, are three great Christian duties — the three foundations of the law ... by them we do homage and service to God with our three principal interests; by prayer with our souls, by fasting with our bodies, by alms-giving with our estates.*”

Here we begin to look at the general principles of our religious life and it is illustrated by our Lord in these 3 areas and we are to take the principles to develop, work them out in our own individual lives and circumstances. Jesus directs our attention to not only what, or how we go about doing religious things, but to examine the motives behind them. Then from right motives we are to carry out our religious duties and privileges, but hopefully we will see more of these as we consider the illustrations our Lord Jesus uses.

Here in this 1st verse this general principle is laid down “*We are not to do our acts of righteousness before men to be seen by them.*” Some say this contradicts what Jesus said earlier “*In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*”

(Matthew 5:16) Yet I would argue it does not. Our good deeds, our righteousnesses are to be done to bring honour to God our Father. It does not mean that we have to do them publicly or secretly. What it does mean is that they are not done for people **to give us praise**, pats on the back i.e. to be seen of men, for the self-honour. We will of necessity have to do some things when it will be known what we have done and these things are to be done to give glory to God and certainly not to draw attention to self. We are to aim to live so that as people see our quality of work, of life, of doing good and they will then praise God for such things - that is to be the aim and motive of our hearts. We are not to live to draw attention to self, to proclaim to people how good we are. Our acts of righteousness are to show forth God and while our righteous acts may be done publicly, but even then they are not to be done for the sake of self-publicity or advertising ourselves.

There is to be a balancing act of doing things in public to glorify God and yet avoid self-publicity. Sadly, it is so easy to become unbalanced and draw attention to ourselves and to our deeds in a wrong way; or even to hide out of sight and never do anything for people to see God's working through in us. There is this subtle sin of vainglory and it is one we are all prone to and the Lord Jesus warns us straightaway "*Be careful...*" - not to please ourselves and seek glory from others; but to seek to please God in all we are, desire, do or say. We have our Lord Jesus as our supreme example as He desired to please God, to glorify Him in everything He desired, said, thought or did.

We are dealing with a difficult area as we are to rid ourselves of self, selfish ends and aims. We are to live to please our heavenly Father in all we do or say. The Lord Jesus knows us through and through. We may not be applauded or rewarded by society, or by Christians around us, but our Father will know all we have done, why we have done it and He will reward us. This is a truth we need to pause and consider often. It has a huge bearing on our lives - for we are always in the presence of God. How can God reward us for these things unless He knows and sees all we do, say or think? That is exactly it - He **really does know** all we do, say or think. We live our lives in His very presence. He is not out there somewhere, out of touch and uninterested. He is near all people, especially His children, at all times in the fullness of His glorious person and knows all we desire, go through, are, say, do or think.

We are to realise with the Psalmist that there is no way we can go from God's presence (Psalm 139:7). We are to apply it and work it out in our lives - our thoughts, desires and motives are known. We are to be done with all sham and pretence; be done with hard and harsh thoughts of others; be done with doubts and fears, be done with veneers of morality, respectability and false spirituality. These things should surely challenge us and as believers we should live lives to please Him in every area.

Perhaps someone here is not a Christian and the thought of God knowing all things about you troubles you! Good, as it is right does so! Realise when we face God on Judgement Day, if we're not a Christian, then He will present all the first-hand evidence to condemn us and it will not be by hearsay.

Recognise He wants us to realise this, so we will go quickly to the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and God will be at peace with you and you with Him and He will be your Father in heaven and you too can know His tender love and care.

If we live for honour and reward from people alone, then it is all we will have. The reward of fame, reputation, riches and suchlike are passing, but God's rewards are eternal. As Christians we are to see there are rewards for true and faithful service and we are to have our eyes on them. Because of this we live and work correctly for our God and Saviour in our spiritual and our ordinary lives. Now we begin to see how this is worked out as Jesus illustrates it in:

2. Our Giving to the Needy.

The Lord Jesus presumes His people will give to those in need - not necessarily money, but time, help, a hand; indeed, anything that is going to help people. Christians are those who have obtained mercy and are to show mercy. Jesus now shows the principles for our giving, providing for those in need and contrasts 2 way of giving to the needy.

A. The wrong way (v2): picture a person, wanting to give to the poor and he hires a trumpeter to let them know where to come, to draw attention to what he is doing. He is a man of charity and he wants other people to know it! While he is helping the poor, really is using the poor to help him and his reputation. This man is fully paid in regard to his reward. He wanted people to "ooh and aah" and pat him on the back. He has fully received his payment - the Greek here uses an accounting word that means "*fully paid*".

As Christians we are not to do it. We do not use trumpets, but we can so easily draw attention to what we do or have done in terms of our giving or any area. We can let it “slip”, we can be subtle about it. We may not mention it to anyone, but it is why we feel so smug and satisfied about such and we give ourselves extra bonus merit points. This is the wrong way for a believer.

B. The correct way (v3 & 4): we are not to seek praise and honour from others, nor are we to seek to praise ourselves either. This is illustrated by v3. We use our hands to work together in so many ways - to lift, catch, carry, hold and work. Whatever one hand does, the other hand knows and they work together almost by instinct. Yet Jesus says in our giving, working, we are not to let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. This does not mean that husbands and wives do not let each other know what they give - there needs to be communication for the sake of home finances! It doesn't mean that the church treasurer is not to know what you give. What it is referring to is that a person must keep their giving to the needy, to the work of the church, their good works and righteous acts etc. a secret - not only to others, but even to themselves! It means we are not to have a Little Jack Horner mentality and say “*What a good boy, girl am I*”. We are not to keep ledgers, books – actual or mental, of our giving, working, witnessing to pat ourselves on the back.

We are to be moved by love - love to God and to others and so give, work and then forget about it. It means we are to be full of the love of God and not to be concerned about self and

our giving, working accounts, or on how good we are. The Lord Jesus shows, in Matthew 25:37-39 (*the sheep and goats*), that the righteous don't remember their past righteousnesses, but the King does (v40) as He takes those things done to the least of His brothers as being done to Him personally and He will reward.

Here in v4 Jesus says the Father will reward such loving and caring children and do so publicly and openly. Such rewards are certain at the end of time, but He can also reward in this life - as God is no man's debtor. Yet we do not do things to receive rewards from God, but do them out of love for Him and other people!

Here we have the principal to carry out all our religious duties, including giving, secretly as far as possible, but not necessarily so, but even if it is publicly it is not to be for self-acclaim, but for God's glory. Then our Father will see those things we did in secret and will reward us, if not in time, then in eternity. Our eyes should be on the Lord, our concern should be to live for His glory and honour and to always do that which pleases Him as we seek to help others.