

This is a house of worship and we are going to continue our worship now in the preaching of the Word. I believe the goal of preaching is to help the hearer to accurately perceive the splendor or glory of God in his Word in a way that invites a response of joyful faith and repentance. To borrow an illustration from someone else, the goal of any Christian should be to function like a telescope for those who do not see the true glory of God which might only appear to them like a distant blip in the sky... while the true majesty of the blazing star can be seen clearly in the eye piece of the telescope. With this illustrations in mind, I visited the Griffith Observatory's website site recently and I found a picture of a traveling preacher...

<Show photo of huge telescope attached to old car> This is Shelly Stoody's 9.5" Zeiss Refractor (Telescope) 1933...And then I also found a photo of televised sermons <show photo of old TV camera pointing into telescope eyepiece>

With this goal in mind, we have put a note page in your bulletin that you can jot on during the message. Please look it over now and I hope you will put it to use like a journal of your thoughts. Today we are studying the first four verses of Matthew chapter 6. Please open your Bibles with me. If you are using the pew Bible you will find it on page 684. We are in our 10th week studying of the Sermon on the Mount as Pastor David has been leading us through Matthew's Gospel these past months. Once you are there at chapter 6, please stand for the reading of God's Word.

<Read Matthew 6:1-4>

<Pray>

So What do I think this text is teaching us?

I will make a case here that this text is teaching us about heart level righteousness. The difference between true and false religion. On a theological level Jesus is continuing from the previous chapter to teach us the difference between the obedience of law-keeping (external righteousness based on personal merit) and the obedience of faith (internal righteousness based on the promise of God). Said differently, the obedience of faith

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is the trusting of God's righteousness and the obedience of law-keeping is the effort of evidencing our own righteousness. Or again, the obedience of faith is trusting God to be a loving and all-powerful Father and therefore we take him at his Word and we obey out of love and trust to his glory and to our great joy of receiving an undeserved gift; while the obedience of law-keeping is expecting God to be an observant score keeper who compares me to those nasty sinners and we obey out of duty and fear to my own praise and my satisfaction of having earned God's favor.

So here we have a distinction between true and false religion...or you might say between a religion and a relationship with God. On a practical level he is teaching us that our obedience and good works and spiritual disciplines should flow from a heart that is devoted to God and not from a heart that is seeking something other than God. Let's examine the text and you can decide for yourself if I am correct and I pray that the Spirit of God will convince each of us of what this means in our lives.

“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.” (Matthew 6:1, ESV)

This verse is about righteousness. But we need to look at it in the context of the Sermon on the Mount and understand his over-all teaching about righteousness to understand why he gives this warning. Follow me back to the beginning of chapter 5 in your Bible...He began the sermon teaching about the heart level attitudes and traits of God's children. Then he noted that the lifestyle of God's children draw others to him and point to him and make others glad in him. See this in 5:13-16. Then in verses 17-20 he clarifies that although his focus is on the heart, he did not come to do away with obedience and righteousness...not at all. He is simply correcting a misunderstanding of it. Note verse 20 here...it is key. “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20, ESV). Taken in light of the remainder of chapter 5, this is really a statement that we must avoid the misunderstanding of the scribes and pharisees. We must have a heart level righteousness instead of the impostor. From verse 21 through the remainder of chapter 5 he gives six examples of how the law has been misunderstood. Jesus points out that the obedience of law-keeping (meeting a minimum standard) is not the point. The law is spiritual we are told in

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Romans 7:14 and yet the religious leaders of Israel had only really obeyed outwardly in a physical sense as to demonstrate the righteousness of their self control to God. Note the final verse of the chapter, verse 48. “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48, ESV). So here Jesus makes clear that the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees was flawed...and therefore not righteousness at all. The supposed minimum standard of the law is blown up by Jesus and we see that perfection of the heart is the actual standard.

So the summary of the law given in Deuteronomy 6:5 and repeated by Jesus in Luke 10:25-28 captures the standard better than a list of all the laws you can find. “And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 He [Jesus] said to him, “**What is written in the Law? How do you read it?**” 27 And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” 28 And he said to him, “**You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.**”” (Luke 10:25–28, ESV). A list of specific do’s and don’ts might be feasible... but this heart level standard of perfection is now impossible, agreed? No desires, thoughts, motives, or actions contrary to a perfect love of God and others? One man did this from birth until death and continues now in life for all eternity. This is our King and our God and our brother and our savior.

So with this context in mind we come into chapter 6 and Jesus is mid-way though correcting their view of righteousness. Doesn’t it make sense that if our obedience is to be an inner, heart level obedience of faith (i.e., trusting God to be a loving Father to us and taking him at his Word), then isn’t it plain that our good works should similarly flow from a heart level devotion to God?

Now picking up again at Matt 6:1.

The warning here establishes a broad principle that practicing supposed righteousness selfishly (for personal gain) will reap no reward from God. Not a smaller reward...no reward. So let’s look at Romans 2 and see what someone with a selfish false righteousness will receive from God. “He will render to each one according to his works: 7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal

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life; 8 but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.” (Romans 2:6–8, ESV). We surely want to be in the right category here...and we have a peek at eternal life as a reward here for selflessly seeking God’s glory and honor.

Moving past the broad principle, for now, in the first verse, verses 2-4 give explanation of one specific implication of the principle. Here it is applied to Almsgiving or giving to the poor. Later, the principle is applied to prayer and fasting and they all have the same pattern of warning.

“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. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:2–4, ESV)

It is plain to see that doing good works or practicing spiritual disciplines or religious activities **for the sake of being seen and praised by others** is the selfish manner he warns us to avoid. But here at verse 2 there is a problem we need to resolve. You will definitely see it if you recall what Jesus said earlier in his sermon about being the light of the world... Jesus just said in 5:16 “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16, ESV). Which one is it? you might legitimately ask...be seen or don’t be seen? Keeping with Jesus’ theme in his Sermon on the Mount, I suggest that the warning here in chapter 6 is about motives or desires of the heart and the resulting intentions of the will and not so much whether the good work is actually seen or not. Interestingly, the Greek verb translated “give glory” in 5:16 about the light shining appears also in 6:2 as “be praised”. The object or recipient in the first case is God but in the second case we see that it is the Almsgiver...and there is all the difference in the world.

So let’s illustrate by going back to the Zeiss Refractor built into Shelly Stoody’s car. Suppose he was sent on a mission to make disciples of the planet Mars. His purpose in life, like all astronomers in my illustration, was to see and enjoy Mars and to help others see and enjoy the glory of Mars and to respond by devoting their lives to

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this planet. But instead of directing people's attention to the eye piece where their focus would be on Mars, he reveled in the attention he received while pointing out the construction of the amazing telescope and how he has ingeniously mounted it on his car and the finish he was able to achieve on the tube and the delicacy of the lenses and the complexity of the refractor? What if the object in the sky was not the main point for this astronomer? What if this astronomer did not receive his joy and satisfaction from praising and seeing others giving praise to Mars but instead from something else? This astronomer would be doing a lot of receiving and not much actual giving at all. He would be the one benefiting and not the needy person who still did not see Mars. Borrowing again from chapter 5, his lamp was under a basket and he was too busy showing off the marvelous basket for those in the house to be lit by the glory of the light!

There sometimes may be no any stopping a few people from seeing my good works (or in the case of this specific example in our text, my giving to the needy), especially when others are supposed to be benefiting from it, but I can ask myself two questions: Who am I seeking to exalt...myself or God? Who am I seeking to serve...myself or others? So I take secret in verse 4 mostly to mean in the inner man. My giving should be a giving from the inner man, a heart level giving. Only God sees my motives and desires and the true me. This righteousness is not visible.

So in verses 2-4 of our text there seems to be a description of two ways to give. Verse 2 is selfish giving looking for attention and praise. Verse 3 is selfless giving that seeks to avoid attention. Verse 2 is giving based on merit or earning something in the action. Verse 3 is giving based on faith that God will be pleased in the giving. Verse 2 is giving to receive. Verse 3 is giving to give. Verse 2 has received an earthly reward from man and it is expended and done (past tense). Verse 3 will receive a future heavenly reward from God and it will be everlasting (future tense).

Let's look at some Biblical examples of these two types of giving and as we do we will consider what this reward is...Acts chapter 4 closes with a description of the community of believers and how they were taking care of one another selflessly and people were selling their land and offering the entirety of the proceeds to the Apostles to distribute as needed. Well, in chapter 5 we see a man and his wife (Ananias and Sapphira) who sell

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their property and then hold back some of the proceeds while making on like they were donating it all... Then refer to the same fate for his wife who joins the party a little late and upholds the same lie. This couple was clearly following the verse 2 example of selfish giving and they did not receive a reward from God.

In Mark chapter 12 there is a poor widow that Jesus notices and comments on.

“And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. 42 And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. 43 And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. 44 For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”” (Mark 12:41–44, ESV)

So we learn another element of selfless giving from her...sacrifice.

Another question to ask myself: Do I give sacrificially or just what I can spare, without disrupting my lifestyle? You see, my giving reveals where my love is and where I am banking my hopes. Are my hopes wrapped up in my finances. Can what I want from this life be purchased? Now I said we would consider what this reward from God is that Jesus speaks of... We already saw in Romans 2:6-8 that God gave eternal life to the one who selflessly seeks after God’s glory and honor and to obtain unending life in his presence. He essentially gives this person what they have already been seeking and living for... God gives us himself. What greater reward could he give? Compare this with Psalm 37:4 “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” What is the desire of my heart? What do I long for? Consider also Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Consider also 2 Cor 9:7 “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” This giver is happy just in the giving. He is giving to give.

So how about the obvious problem of not giving to the needy at all?

Jesus assumed that we would be giving and was therefore warning us only about the manner of our giving. He already said in Matt 5:42 “Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow

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from you.” So what keeps us from giving more to those in need? For one, I don’t think the praise of men can ever be enough motivation to cause us to give sacrificially, at detriment to our lifestyle and comfort or security. Think on the likely difference in motives between the rich givers and the poor widow from Mark 12.

Or maybe we don’t know the love of God...listen to Jesus describe his sheep in Matthew 25:31-46.

<READ Matt 25:31-46>

This is a description of believers who know God. Followers of Jesus who are compassionate and giving and who love others with sincerity. Listen to 1 John 3:17 “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.” Perhaps we know Jesus but we are (myself included) caught in the thorns of the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life (We call it the American Dream and consumerism). We cannot barely even give from our excess, let alone sacrificially. If I am more concerned about my new app or my dream car or my kids performance on the team or her grade in trigonometry or my promotion or my hair appointment than I am about the suffering and affliction in this world then I need to look into the eyepiece and let God change my perspective. It may be that I am still a babe of the faith just working on repenting still when I should be laying down my life for the cause of Christ in this life. Maybe we are more concerned about the possibility that we could be taken advantage of then we are about the certainty of the needs of others. Am I worried that the homeless person that I am picturing right now might buy booze or cigarettes or drugs with my money? Did I ever think about giving him a gift card to McDonald’s or Subway? I can get packs of these things at the grocery store. Maybe we are too selfish to allow ourselves to be aware of the need...

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You will find an insert in your bulletin with more information on how to give to help fight global hunger. 80% of funds to Global Hunger Relief are funneled to the IMB for international efforts and 20% to the NAMB for domestic efforts or you can donate directly and individually to the IMB or NAMB. You can even donate

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through Crossroad by indicating on your donation card how much you want to go to domestic hunger or world hunger and the funds will be sent to these organizations. You can make this a regular monthly donation and it can be between you, your spouse, your credit card company, the IMB perhaps and God. No trumpets, no praise, just giving.

Let's conclude by looking at one last biblical example of giving and then focusing back on the big principle and considering why this teaching is so important in my life. God is the Father of lights and the giver of every good and perfect gift...

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16, ESV)

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32, ESV)

“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8, ESV)

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20, ESV)

Jesus is not teaching us a better way of being moral here. Jesus is not trying to make me open my wallet. He wants me to open my heart and I cannot truly do this on my own. I need to power of God and I need to know this giver who gave himself for me. Let me now draw a mental picture for you contrasting the two ways to obey God. The difference here is the difference between darkness and light...and eternity is in the balance. At the beginning of this message I described the obedience of law-keeping being practiced by the scribes and pharisees vs the obedience of faith that Jesus was teaching, which is explicitly called for in the beginning and end of Paul's letter to the Romans (1:5 and 16:26). I need to bridge quickly to make a connection here so as someone who trusts in God through his Son Jesus Christ, Galatians chapter 3 and Romans chapter 4 tells me

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that I am a son of Abraham. Although I am not an ethnic Jew, you could say this makes me a spiritual Jew. Now In Romans 2:28-29 we have a description of a true Jew or “true religion” speaking to our heart level righteousness...“For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. 29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.”

Has the Spirit of God circumcised my heart?

There in your chair and in your heart answer these questions for yourself about righteousness. Which kind of obedience did you presume to be what God requires when you walked in the door today?: Is the obedience that God is calling for...One of self control where you hold back your desires according to rules? Is it having an iron will and resisting the things you really want? Is it about self preservation by observing guidelines of conduct? Or, is the obedience God is calling for fulfillment of your heart’s desire complete surrender of your will and total abandon of your rights, and your efforts of self preservation?...all for the sake of God’s name and the joy of others? The obedience of law-keeping is a merit system where I trust in my goodness and in my ability to demonstrate this to God. The obedience of faith is a grace system (not earned) where I trust in God’s goodness and in his ability to keep his promises. We must understand the righteousness of God and we must have it if we are to be saved from the wrath and fury of a righteous and just God.

Paul the Apostle said this speaking to the Romans about his fellow Jews, “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” (Romans 10:1–4, ESV). Oh, may we not try to establish our own righteousness before God! And then in 2 Corinthians 5:21 “For our sake he [the Father] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” The only righteousness that will save us is that of the King of kings, the Lord Jesus.

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So what kind of righteousness do I have, what kind of obedience am I practicing? Or if you walked in today not so concerned with obedience to God, which one would you have figured was the required obedience? If this obedience of faith is foreign to you, I invite you...come, look into the telescope and see Jesus. Know the love of God. He gave everything for you and our Heavenly Father will continue for all eternity to give to you if you would simply trust him. Give your life and it will be saved. Live for the glory of God and receive abundant and eternal life. A rich young man once asked Jesus what was necessary to be perfect and to have eternal life and Jesus told him to give up absolutely everything and to follow him...this young man could keep some rules, but he couldn't do this. How about you, would you give your life to Jesus?

<Let's pray>