

## Matthew 6:1-8 – “Secret Service”

Moving into chapter 6 Jesus continues to teach on the Kingdom Way in this Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is laying out that true citizens of this ‘already kingdom rule of Jesus in their hearts’ is meant to change the heart. We’re to live and behave differently than we used to.

This next section is divided up into three segments: the believer and worship (6:1-18); the believer and wealth (6:19-34); and the believer and their walk (7:1-12). It deals with man’s relationship to God, to the world, and to others.

Now many of us I’m sure have known people that used to go to church and now no longer do. Now, removing the Covid crowd of those who got used to watching church online in their pajamas and have not gone back, the typical answer you hear from those who do not attend church is\_\_\_\_\_?

- The one answer I would say that rises to the top of the list for people is that the church is full of hypocrites!
- How are we supposed to respond to that kind of accusation? Guilty as charged! We are a bunch of sinners saved by grace and looking to the only One who is righteous – Jesus.
- We are all susceptible to hypocrisy. It reminds me of the guy who said, “The other day I saw my neighbour talking to her cat. You could tell she thought the cat understood everything she was saying. I came home and told my dog all about it. We had a good laugh over that.”

We’re first introduced to this term hypocrite in Matthew’s gospel here in Chapter 6. Jesus is going to use this term 14 times in the gospel. It was obviously an important issue to Jesus and should be to us. Hypocrisy certainly should not be a mark of those who are citizens of the kingdom.

**6:1-2 - “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. <sup>2</sup> Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.**

*Take heed* means to beware. Perk up! Be careful about this.

The religious leaders were exemplifying a righteousness based on works. This was the wrong way to be a citizen of the kingdom. Remember those key words: Your righteousness needs to exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20).

So, Jesus continues to challenge outward actions versus inward attitudes. True righteousness comes through faith in Jesus and a change of heart that He brings. He gives us a new heart. And that should translate to a change in the way we function and live.

Three functions of the believer that get addressed in the first half of this chapter is **giving, prayer, and fasting**.

And in each of these examples of the believer and worship, notice Jesus says, **when** you do these things (6:2 – **when you do a charitable deed**; 6:5 – **when you pray**; 6:18 – **when you fast**).

- These aren't suggestions to try out in our lives. These are to be the things that characterize the citizen of the Kingdom of God. We've seen previously in chapter 5 attitudes and actions that are to mark the believer regarding others, now here's attitudes and actions that are to be evident in our relationship with God.

First of all, notice something, our work is rewarded! Nothing you do when done for the Lord is done in vain!

- **1 Corinthians 15:58**, *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."*

The Lord desires to reward all things done for Him. That's an encouraging thought, that there's nothing that goes unseen or without value when done for the Lord.

The question is, is what we are doing being done for the Lord? Here's one way to gauge this – what's your **motive** for the things you do?

The Christians desire should be to bring glory and praise to the name of Jesus and not to self.

Now in this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has already mentioned something about this.

- **Matthew 5:16**, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."*

- We're told to let our good works be seen, but in 6:1 Jesus says don't do your good works ***to be seen by them***. Which one is it?? It's both! But again, it all comes down to your motive and as we've said, the heart of the matter is a matter of the heart. Where is your heart in these things?
- If our heart is to perform a good work (specifically we're talking about doing a ***charitable deed***; giving) are we doing it so others can see it and pat us on the back and give us accolades for how great of a person we are? Are you seeking the praise of men for yourself, or are you desiring all praise to be directed to Jesus for what you do?

These are heart issues.

Now, if we're doing good for our own praise, then you're not going to have any reward from God. God is the One who will reward you for what you do, but if we're trying to skip the queue and get it from others, then you forfeit the greater blessing that our heavenly Father has for you.

Regarding this act of a charitable deed, giving was something that the people were very familiar with. They were brought up with the instruction that whatever you received, God would get a tenth. This idea of tithing was just ingrained into their thinking. All was the Lord's anyways, but it was a good test of their hearts to see if they would give back to Him what was His already. But then there was additional giving on top of that. The tithe was for the Lord, but the giving was used to help people that were poor or less fortunate. Jesus is talking about this kind of giving.

- Originally in the Temple there was a room called the Chamber of Secrets. It was a place where people could go secretly and give money. It was here where poorer people were helped by the offerings brought in there.
- But human nature began to get the better of the situation and it wasn't long before the Pharisees thought it didn't make sense to go all the way to the Temple to give alms to the poor. We'll just go out on the streets and in the synagogues and blow our trumpets to indicate we have money to give to those in need. And so, when people heard the trumpets sounding, they would go to these guys as they handed out their giving with much conceit, and everyone would stand around and go, *"Ooh, that guy is so Godly!"*
- The gesture may have been good, but their hearts were all wrong. They did it for the accolades. They robbed God of the glory and now they would be robbed of His reward.

- They would still have a reward, but their reward would be of earthly value, not eternal value. Jesus says, ***they have their reward***. This means they have their reward in full. There's nothing more that will come from this act. So hopefully you soak it in. Better enjoy it now because that's all you're gonna get out of that charitable deed.

“Of such people, who seek the praise of men, Jesus says with emphasis: *they have their reward*. The verb translated ‘have’ (*apechō*) was at that time a technical term in commercial transactions; it meant to ‘receive a sum in full and give a receipt for it’.<sup>1</sup> It was often so used in the papyri. So the hypocrites who seek applause will get it, but then ‘they have had all the reward they are going to get’.<sup>2</sup> Nothing further is due to them, nothing but judgment on the last day.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus called them ***hypocrites***:

Hypocrites were known as pretenders. It comes from the Greek word *hupokrites* which meant actor. An actor would wear various masks to portray different emotions or characters. We get the term ‘two-faced’ from this. This is how the Pharisees were behaving. They would put on a show in front of people of great piety, but then the mask would come off and you would see they were far from the people they were pretending to be. This term became synonymous with a pretender.

**6:3-4 - *But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.***

*Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing...* This is more than just mere hyperbole; our giving should be done in such a way that we ourselves don't even dwell on it or applaud ourselves. It's very easy to do things in a way where it's kept from others, but we need to be aware of our own growing fanfare to want to congratulate ourselves for being such a wonderful charitable human being. Don't dwell on the work you've done to make the world a better place, thank Jesus that He gives us opportunities to reflect His love and grace.

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<sup>1</sup> AG.

<sup>2</sup> JBP.

<sup>1</sup> Stott, J. R. W., & Stott, J. R. W. (1985). *The message of the Sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian counter-culture* (pp. 129–130). InterVarsity Press.

And we don't have to be overly concerned with someone seeing us doing something good. You don't need to stand at the offering boxes in the church waiting to drop an envelope in at just the precise time someone isn't watching or walking by. You don't have to go out of your way to be secretive. Just make sure your motive is to do that act for God and not for your own praise or honor.

Remember, nothing you do for the Lord will be done in vain. He sees all. Even when it's done in secret, He sees and He is the One that rewards us. It may be experienced today through the joy of being like Christ in giving sacrificially.

(Jesus said: *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."* – Acts 20:35).

But we know it will also be received just in hearing the words, *'Well done good and faithful servant... enter into the joy of the Lord'* – Matthew 25:21.

- "When we give, we can know that "[our] Father who sees in secret will reward [us]." Of course, the greatest and most wonderful reward is the fact I get God himself. I may get a gift, but it is even better that I get the gift Giver. I get him for all of eternity as my perfect heavenly Father. That gift is more than enough." <sup>2</sup>

After dealing with giving and charitable deeds, Jesus will next touch on another spiritual practise: prayer.

**6:5 - *"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."***

The religious leaders of this day established 3 hours of prayer: the third hour, sixth hour and ninth hour – 9 a.m., noon, and 3 p.m. And the most prestigious place to pray was in the temple or one of the synagogues.

- And they would often conveniently be late getting to the temple and would stop where they were on the corner and begin to pray loudly with their motivation to be seen by others. Or it was also an attempt to show their holiness that they couldn't wait to get to the temple they just had to stop and pray right then and there. They were filled with such zeal. And of course, they would pick the biggest, most heavily trafficked corners.

Jesus again calls them hypocrites because they were putting on an act of spirituality or holiness, but they were far from it. They were pretenders.

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<sup>2</sup> Akin, D. (2019). *Exalting Jesus in the sermon on the mount*. Holman Bible Publishers.



These are all great things to do – giving and praying, but God isn't interested in it if our hearts aren't sincere and motivated by service to Him.

- Of course praying publicly is not wrong when it comes to praying at church, with other believers, or over a meal. But if you come up to a group at the mall that you know and you just start praying out loud over them it's gonna get kind of weird. It's not the natural way to greet someone.
- Be careful you don't act in ways that's trying to puff up a show of spirituality. The religious leaders were doing this just to get praise from others and make themselves look more holy than others.

**John 12:43**, *"for they [Pharisees] loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."*

Unfortunately, these religious leaders who were being praised by people were getting their reward in full. There would be no lasting fruit or eternal benefit from their work. It's sad that they got so mixed up and made it all about themselves. In doing so.

**6:6 - *But you, 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.***

Prayer is a time to connect with God, away from distractions. So go into your room and pray.

- The word room is an ancient Greek word meaning storeroom. More precisely a storeroom where treasures are kept. Isn't that cool?
- When you get alone with God in your prayer closet to simply commune with Him, there are treasure waiting for you there. Take advantage of the amazing invitation and open door we have to come and approach God and be with Him.

**6:7-8 - *And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. <sup>8</sup> "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him."***

***Vain repetitions*** and ***many words***. We don't need to have a big intro to our prayers.

- One famous Jewish prayer began like this: "Blessed, praised, and glorified, exalted, and honored, magnified and lauded be the name of the Holy One."

Could you imagine if Peter prayed a prayer like that as he was sinking in the Sea of Galilee? He would have been a dead duck. Instead, he prayed, *“Lord save me!”*

Repetitive prayers are something Jesus said that heathens do. This is not the mark of a believer in relationship to a Heavenly Father. Beware of falling into repeating prayers. Mantras are not the same as heartfelt conversations.

Is it wrong to repeat things in prayer?

- Jesus repeated His prayer 3 times in the Garden of Gethsemane, Paul prayed for the thorn in the flesh to be removed 3 times. But the heart was right, it was meaningful repetition.
- This was seeking the Lord over direction and understanding.

The problem lies when we are trying to impress others, rather than just being real with God. And I’m sure we’ve all been there, trying to be eloquent and fanciful to make people think we must be really close to God. Or we are trying to inform others through prayer and so we explain things in great detail when God is already knowing the beginning from the end (6:8).

- Solomon summed it up quite well in **Ecclesiastes 5:2**, *“God is in heaven, and you are on earth; therefore let your words be few”*.

Now, if God knows what we need before we ask, why pray?? Because God wants us to be in fellowship with Him. When we ask Him and present our needs before Him, He already knows, but He wants us to recognize the source of our help. He wants us to live dependent on Him and to express our need for Him. We don’t need to wail and beat our chest for His help or pray some fanciful wordy prayer to get Him to act. He just wants us to be before Him and sharing our heart to Him. He already knows what we need, but He wants us to develop a heart of dependence on Him. And what we need more than any item or specific request, is just simply Him. Prayer allows us to be refreshed and refocussed on our heavenly Father where we can experience His peace, comfort, and strength. So, we must never neglect prayer. We just need to have a right motive in our prayers – communion and connection with God.

Now that Jesus showed us what prayer isn’t, we’ll look at what prayer is next week when we pick it up in verse 9.