

Late one night, a man had gone to a party and had too much to drink, so he decided it would be best to walk home. He found a shortcut through a poorly lit cemetery and, in the darkness, stumbled into a large open grave. He tried to climb out but the walls were too muddy and slippery. Again and again, he fell back into the grave, until finally, in exhaustion, he settled in a corner to wait for daylight.

A few moments later, another man in a similar drunken condition was cutting through the cemetery and he fell victim to the same open grave. He, too, tried desperately to climb and claw his way out, and he was just as unsuccessful.

As his motivation waned in utter hopelessness, he heard a voice from the darkness: "You may as well give up. You'll never get out of here." Oh, but he did!

We are continuing to make our way through the *Sermon on the Mount* where Jesus has told the crowd who have tagged along with Him up the hill, that their theology was all wrong because they had no regard for matters of the heart. They were wrong about murder and the heart problem of anger. They were wrong about adultery and lust and treating their wives as disposable property creating a culture of adultery. They were wrong about their oaths and vows and promises – they were saying one thing and yet doing another – their words carried no weight, and they were wrong about love and hate.

Jesus explained to the crowd what was wrong with their theology from God's point of view, and now as we begin this next section of His sermon, Jesus addresses another problem of the heart and He tells the crowd that the way they practice their faith was also wrong – their motives were wrong – their worship and their service was nothing but a show – they're just going through the motions to be seen by others, and to bring all of this nonsense out in the open, Jesus uses the three most basic disciplines of their faith – *giving, praying, and fasting* to illustrate how it all really played out in their lives.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Matthew 6** and we will begin with **verse 1**.

"Take care not to practice your righteousness in the sight of people, to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven."

Have you ever seen one of those surveys that make you question your morals? Often times, the question goes something like this: "If you knew you could do anything and not ever get caught, what would you do?"

I've seen surveys where people were asked about doing certain things like stealing and having an affair, and amazingly, some of the surveys indicated that over half would do what is wrong as long as there was a guarantee they wouldn't get caught.

Now, to switch things up a bit, when it comes to acts righteousness, if you thought you would never get noticed or recognized, if no one would ever know what you did but you and God, and you couldn't tell anybody what you did, would you still do it? Would you do something good if you thought you wouldn't get caught?

I suspect that most of us would say that's a piece of cake, but given our self-centered nature – it's harder than it seems.

During the Lord's earthly ministry, Jesus interacted with three different kinds of people – the *righteous*, the *unrighteous*, and the *self-righteous*, and of these three, it was the *self-righteous* that really seemed to rub Jesus the wrong way. Typically, these were the Jewish religious leaders – the Pharisees who turned their acts of worship and their acts of service into a public performance for the purpose of drawing attention to themselves.

They were hypocrites – like actors on a stage who wore masks, who put on an outward *act* of righteousness without an inward *reality* in their hearts, and Jesus expressed concern that His followers would slip into the same phony hypocrisy – and if you aren't sure what hypocrisy is – it's kind of like the way we clean house, when on short notice, we learn that company is coming over. We are shoving junk into closets, under beds, in drawers, in dishwashers, anywhere it can't be seen. Now, I'm not suggesting that's a bad way to clean house, but it is a terrible way to deal with the spiritual junk in our lives. These hypocrites looked righteous on the outside – that's how they wanted to appear, but appearances can be deceiving.

Now, if you notice in the verse, Jesus begins with the words “**take care**” – both a command and a concern, which means *to beware*, *to be on the alert* because He knew that our self-centered nature tempts us to seek the attention and the applause of others who think – typically on a Sunday morning, that we are on the right track. We are tempted to take the credit – to impress others so as to please ourselves in the process, and ultimately, that's the underlying motivation here.

Jesus knows this. He knows we are tempted to be seen – and just for clarification, not all acts that are seen are wrong. If you recall, Jesus has already told the crowd

“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

As a follower of Christ, our light should shine. Our character and our conduct should be a ray of light in the darkness – our acts of righteousness may be seen – if you think about it, many of the Lord’s acts were seen, but that’s not His concern. His concern was not the public acts – His concern was the motivation behind the acts. **Why do we do what we do? Is it based on a desire to impress and to be popular? Is it an act so that people will see us and glorify us, or that they may see God more clearly and glorify Him?**

Marc Axelrod explains a disorder that he’s discovered called AGD. Here’s what he says: “There’s nothing wrong with being appreciated. But when we cherish the praises of men more than we cherish the praises of God, then we have a problem. When we care more about the applause of earth than we do about the applause of heaven, then we have an Attention Getting Disorder.”

Yes, if what you seek is the attention and the applause from others, then people might be applauding you, but the God who made you won’t be, and the applause of others will be your only **reward** – and even that will come and go.

So, as best as we can, we really need to get our reason for worship and service straightened out. **Why do we do what we do? In your heart, who do you really want to be in the spotlight?** If it is you – then in the end, your righteousness is worthless and it will not be rewarded by your Father who is in heaven.

Now beginning with **verse 2**, Jesus singles out the first discipline of their faith – that being *giving*. He says,

“So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, so that they will be praised by people. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.”

If you notice right out the gate, Jesus begins with an assumption. He begins with the words **“so when you give to the poor”** – not *if* you give, but *when* you give, meaning Jesus takes it for granted that His followers are givers – and in the context here – this is about giving to those in need.

Giving was a practice commanded way back in ancient Jewish history by Moses – it was expected that those who were able would help those who were not, it was

their form of social service, it was expected in Jesus' day, and we have no reason to believe that He expects any less from us today.

Jesus rightly assumes that God's people who see a brother or sister in need are going to step up to help if they can. This is what we do – this is what we are supposed to do – it's expected of us to show generosity towards those in genuine need, and when we do this, Jesus says **do not sound the trumpet before you as the hypocrites do.**

So, what does Jesus mean by not *sounding the trumpet*? Well, let me say, there is some disagreement amongst Bible scholars regarding the exact meaning of this phrase. Some say that there is a lack of historical evidence connecting the giving to the poor and the blowing of a trumpet, and therefore they speculate that Jesus was merely using a figure of speech similar to "*don't toot your own horn*" so everybody takes notice of what you're doing.

Others suggest, and this comes from some Jewish writings, that the religious leaders – the Pharisees tied a little silver trumpet to their belts, and when they made their way through the streets, ideally to a busy street corner where all the people were, they would blow their little trumpet proclaiming they were ready to give, and upon hearing this, the poor in the area would gather around the religious leader to get their money, and of course, everyone would heap praises upon him for his generosity.

Anyway, regardless of the historical evidence or the lack thereof – one thing is for certain – there was a deliberate effort by the self-righteous to draw attention to their act of giving to the poor. Now of course, we don't blow into little trumpets – that's ridiculous, but somehow, we still manage to call attention to our giving.

We do something for somebody in need and of course we say "*Hey, don't tell anybody I helped you*" but deep down inside we can't wait until somebody brings it up so others can say how generous we are. We have our own little trumpets too. We want people know we gave, but Jesus says, "*Don't toot your own horn. Don't draw attention to yourself like the hypocrites, for if you do, you will receive your reward in full.*"

So, if your heart's desire is to be seen by others, if your motive is to be noticed and recognized – if that's what you want – then that's exactly what you will get – you will get your attention and your applause, but that's all you will get. That is your reward, your only reward, and you will get it in full.

Henry Ironside said that, *“Nothing is more objectionable than advertised charity. It is extremely humiliating to the one who receives, and hurtful to the soul of the one who gives.”*

So, Jesus has told us how not to give by drawing attention to ourselves, now beginning with **verse 3**, He tells His listeners what the proper approach is.

³“But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your charitable giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

When we give to the poor, and once again, Jesus takes it for granted that’s what His followers are doing – *when* we give to the poor, He says **“do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”** and I think there are a couple of ways to view this.

First, as Jesus has already said in so many words, our giving to those in need is to be a personal thing where we are not seeking to draw the attention of others, which was the complete opposite of the hypocrites.

They gave to be seen, they did it in the open, they did it on the street corners, they tooted their own horns, but the child of the kingdom who realizes their Father in heaven is constantly watching and sees it all – to them it’s a personal thing. It’s a private moment of worship, and maybe as said by Andrew Bonar: *“The best part of all Christian work is that part which Christ alone sees.”*

Now secondly, when Jesus says **“do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”** this could be a really creative way of saying: *“Don’t let your right hand and your left hand come together to clap with applause because you are such a gracious and generous giver.”*

So, it all comes back to the heart – to our motives. **Why do we do what we do? Is it to gloat? Is it to take credit? Is it for the spotlight, or is it simply to give away what God has given us to give away?**

Leadership Magazine carried a story about four young men, Bible College students, who were renting a house together. One Saturday morning someone knocked on their door. And when they opened it, there stood this bedraggled-looking old man. His eyes were kind of marbled, and he had a silvery stub of whiskers on his face. His clothes were ragged and torn. His shoes didn’t match.

In fact, they were both for the same foot. And he carried a wicker basket full of unappealing vegetables that he was trying to sell.

The boys felt sorry for him and bought some of his vegetables just to help him out. Then he went on his way. But from that time on, every Saturday he appeared at their door with his basket of vegetables. As the boys got to know him a little bit better, they began inviting him in to visit a while before continuing on his rounds. They soon discovered that his eyes looked marbled not because of drugs or alcohol, but because of cataracts. They learned that he lived just down the street in an old shack. They also found out that he could play the harmonica, that he loved to play Christian hymns, and that he really loved God. So, every Saturday they would invite him in, and he would play his harmonica and they would sing Christian hymns together.

They became good friends, and the boys began trying to figure out ways to help him. They finally collected a bunch of clothes and secretly left it all on his doorstep, no note attached or anything. The following Saturday morning, the story says, right in the middle of all their singing and praising, he suddenly said to them, "God is so good!" And they all agreed, "Yes, God is so good."

He went on, "You know why He is so good?" They asked, "Why?" He said, "Because yesterday, when I got up and opened my door, there were boxes full of clothes and shoes and coats and gloves. Yes, God is so good!" And the boys smiled at each other and chimed in, "Yes, God is so good."

He went on, "You know why He is so good?" They answered, "You already told us why." "Well, there's more" he said, "Because I found a family who could use those things and I gave them all away."

This old man understood that God gave him a right hand and a left hand – one hand to receive with and the other to give with. He gave away what God had given him to give away. It's as simple as that. He did what is expected of all of us, and Jesus says when we give in that way, we will be rewarded by God.

Now, that begs the question: **How are we rewarded?**

Well, first of all Jesus is not talking about salvation, and we know this because salvation is a *gift* – never a *reward*. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, it is the gift of God and not the result of works that we could ever boast, but with that said, our works are rewarded once we are saved – and

sometimes those rewards are immediate and what I mean by that is there is a satisfaction that comes from being in the center of God's will and knowing He worked through you to meet the need of another.

Just to hear in my heart "*Well done good and faithful servant*" is more than enough – but still there is more.

We also know there will be rewards in heaven after our actions and our motives are evaluated. This is what Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 3**, beginning with **verse 10**,

¹⁰ According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. ¹¹ For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

There will come a time when Jesus evaluates the *quality* of our actions and our motives, and those actions and motives that don't measure up – those He considers to be worthless like wood, and hay and straw – they will be burned up as though they never existed. And for those actions and motives that Jesus considers worthy and valuable like gold, and silver, and precious stones – they will be rewarded.

So, *what* we do, and *why* we do what we do in this life is rewarded in the next.

The novelist Dr. A. J. Cronin was once a practicing physician in a small Welsh mining village. He worked with a nurse who for twenty years had given her patients loving attention and care. Dr. Cronin was greatly impressed with her ability and considered her an exemplary member of her profession.

*When he learned how small her salary was, he said, "**Nurse, why don't you make them pay you more?**" It's ridiculous that you should work for so little." She replied that she was getting enough to meet her needs. "But you deserve more," the doctor replied. "God knows you're worth it." The nurse was silent for a moment, then with a smile on her face she replied, "Dr. Cronin, if God knows I'm worth it, that's all that matters!"*

Source Material:

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