

IF JESUS PREACHED A SERMON IN OUR CHURCH - Studies In The Sermon On The Mount - Part ten

Sunday, December 21st, 2025, 5:30 p.m.

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HONORING GOD WITH YOUR SECRET LIFE - Matthew 6:1-18 -

“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. [2] “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. [5] “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [6] But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. [7] “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. [8] Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. [9] Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. [10] Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. [11] Give us this day our daily bread, [12] and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. [13] And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [14] For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, [15] but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. [16] “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [17] But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, [18] that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

1) **IN THIS PASSAGE JESUS GIVES THE MAP TO SPIRITUAL TREASURE**

He tells us that spiritual transformation isn't found where many think. In His matchless grace, He tries to keep us from looking in the wrong places for a deeper walk with Him. ***We can easily think the major, big, dramatic events of life are the transforming ones.*** Jesus says it's not so. We think the ***dramatic events*** are the ones to emphasize. Jesus teaches that ***true disciples are rarely formed in dramatic ways.***

This is the abiding lesson on how to become like Jesus. It rarely happens ***quickly***. And it never happens in ***outward show***. ***Celebration and worship and service*** (all of which are very important) can and do develop in the more visible settings of the Christian life. The ***disciplines*** of holiness, purity and power that ***fuel*** the visible life are only formed in secret.

Jesus applies this principle to all of the disciplines mentioned in this passage - to ***giving*** (2-4), ***praying*** (6), and ***fasting*** (16-18). The central idea in all of these cases is that ***religious people can quickly love the admiration these disciplines can bring. This immediately destroys the motive and the fruitfulness of these disciplines.*** God, on the other hand, particularly rewards ***what is done for Him anonymously***. So, power comes from what we do in secret.

2) **THIS SAME PRINCIPLE IS RESTATED BY JESUS IN OTHER PLACES**

It comes out strongly in some of His parables:

Matthew 13:31-33 - "He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. {32} Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches." {33} He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

In fact, whether you are thinking about *mustard seed, yeast, or the image of salt used in the Sermon on the Mount, the idea of gradual, hidden growth is unescapable in the teaching of Jesus.* You can't **hear** salt work. You can't **see** it work either. You **taste** its presence as you eat. You **sense** the difference it makes. You **experience** it rather than **observe** it.

Jesus is saying our lives will only bear the ***imprint*** of His presence when we've paid the price of private devotion. This can't be worked up in a public meeting.

3) **IS THERE A CONTRADICTION HERE?**

Matthew 5:16 - "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

How do these words fit with Jesus' specific command **not** to practice our religion in front of the crowds?

Matthew 6:2,5 - “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....[5]....And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.”

There are two important distinctions that help us see what Jesus is teaching in these two passages:

- a) ***The motives in each case are totally different*** - In the examples mentioned in chapter 6, the clear desire of those men is **"to be honored by men"(2)**, and **"to be seen by men"(5)**, and **"to show men they are fasting"(17)**. At the core in each case is a desire to ***win the applause of the crowd***. This is the desire that fuels the deed. God has been pushed to the side. Ego reigns on the throne.

In Matthew 5:16 *the glory goes to God Himself* - “....let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

God is put at the center of attention. He is the one noticed, not the disciple at all. This leads to the second distinction:

- b) ***The acts of righteousness are different in each case*** - In all of the examples listed in **Matthew 6:1-18** the deeds are acts of ***personal devotion*** that are wrenched from their proper place of exercise and pushed into the public life. There is no need for others to know I'm fasting. There's no need, other than the feeding of my pride, for others to know what I give. There's no need for others to see me rhyming off my private devotion to my Lord in front of the TV cameras.

In **Matthew 5:16** the deeds that men notice are ***acts of a Christlike treatment of others***. This is made especially clear in the surrounding context of **Matthew 5:9-12** - **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. [10] “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [11] “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”**

This is what people ***should*** notice about a disciple's religion. He doesn't strike back. He's forgiving. He goes the second mile. These deeds don't ***feed*** my pride. They ***cost*** my pride. I lay down my own rights. Only God get's the painful glory of my relinquished self-will.

4) **GOOD ACTIONS ARE SPOILED BY BAD MOTIVES**

In other words, you don't have to **do** wrong to **be** wrong. Right actions become wrong if your heart is wrong while you do them. This is how Jesus **fulfills** the law. Jesus picks some of the very best things Christians can do - **giving, praying, and fasting** - and says these can actually pollute the soul if the heart isn't right in its motives.

Jesus' teaching here is consistent with the way He traces the outward sins of murder and adultery back to their roots of hatred and lust. Sin begins long before the outward actions reveal the inward heart.

Spiritual disciplines are like underwear - necessary, but indecent if worn outwardly. I think Paul used that illustration somewhere in the book of Romans.