

A Warning that Our Hearts Need

Matthew 6:1-4

It is an obvious comment to say that Jesus knows and understands our hearts, but let me emphasize that anyway at the outset this afternoon. As we enter Matthew chapter 6, remember the focus of Matthew 5, which is an exposition of the law of God. Perhaps the overall theme of that chapter could be identified as righteousness. With reference to the law of God which Jesus says he did not come to destroy, we read,

v.20 “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

And then, after intensifying the duties and obligations of the law so that the self-righteous Pharisees could no longer judge themselves to be innocent, we studied last week,

Mat. 5:48 “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

In other words, complete, mature, accomplishing the goal and purpose for which God saved you. The context is righteousness. Then, in that same context, we move into chapter 6, where Jesus identifies such a common propensity of all mankind, the propensity to show off. To boast. The propensity to make yourself look good. Or as we read in verse 1, doing “your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them.” More simply, it’s called pride. And this text is,

I. A NECESSARY WARNING AGAINST PRIDE.

This is one of those texts that brings you immediately into the context of self-examination. There is nothing here that needs to be explained, in a doctrinal sense. Nothing here that is confusing. No need for a lot of word studies or dictionaries or even

commentaries. Just a surface level exhortation that serves as a reminder of the evidence of the fallen nature of man that resides in everyone of us. Pride is a very broad way to look at it. To be more specific, the reality is that,

A. The evidence of pride is the desire for your own recognition.

v.1a

Think about it. How often do you want to make yourself look good? How often do you do something so that others will recognize you? Perhaps you could call that insecurity, the fear of man. You could call it being self-absorbed. Self-focused. Or full of yourself. The reality is, your own actions are influenced by the attention and recognition that others give to you.

Few people can honestly say that isn’t an issue. For some people, it is a glaring issue. Even short of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Simply the desire for recognition. The desire to be noticed. The need to be affirmed, appreciated, or just thanked.

What a dangerous trap that is, to allow your actions to be influenced by whether or not anyone else recognizes it. And if you engage with someone else with your own need to be recognized as a primary consideration, that relationship is doomed to failure, to dysfunction. That’s true for husbands and wives. Its true for parents and children. Its true for your relationships in the business and professional world. And it is certainly true in the church. The evidence of pride is the desire for your own recognition.

So, please, search your own hearts. And do so honestly, earnestly. Learn to hate what is evil. And pride is evil. Remember,

Mat. 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

Blessed are the humble, the lowly-minded, those who are crushed in spirit.

Prov. 11:2 “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.”

So think about how you desire to be recognized? How has this common sin infected your own heart and soul? How are you tempted to “[do] your charitable deeds before men to be seen by them?” Please consider those questions in your own heart. And please listen to Jesus, when he says, “Take heed.” “Beware...” Beware of doing that very thing. Beware of the dangerous infection of pride in your own heart, and where you see it, where you find, confess it as sin and repent.

James 4:6 “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double- minded. 9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

v.1 “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them ...”

And then continue reading,

v.1 “...Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

That’s quite different from what we read in,

1 Peter 5:6 “6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”

The obvious point is that,

B. The result of pride is the loss of any praise from God.

If you do things in order to be noticed, if you do things to draw attention to yourself, to make yourself look good, then you will receive praise from those who see you. You will have your reward. And that’s it. You have your reward in full. It is complete, for “you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

Or, the end of verse 2, “Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.” In full.

So if you want the recognition of men, if you live for the praise of men, you will often be able to get it. But that’s all you will get. You will forfeit any praise from God.

This is not a small matter. This is not an optional matter. This is not a matter for some Christians to consider at some advanced stage of Christian maturity. This is for everyone. Every one of us. It is a necessary warning against pride. It is a warning given to us consistently throughout Scripture.

1 John 2:15 “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world— the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life —is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

The pride of life is part of the world. It is an evidence of the fallen, sinful nature of man. It is the testimony of our total

depravity. It is evil. So beware such pride as would give you the desire to be noticed and recognized for whatever acts of righteousness you are able to do.

Jesus then describes and defines for us,

II. A PRACTICAL ALTERNATIVE TO PRIDE.

v.2-4

Let's look at those verses for a few more minutes, and again, there is no deep, mysterious secret to understanding what Jesus means. In plain and obvious terms,

A. Don't parade your righteousness before others.

Jesus' words: v.2a "Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you..."

Don't make an announcement. Don't flaunt your giving. Interesting, isn't it, that Jesus uses the donations of money as the first example of acts of righteousness. Such a common temptation, to let yourself be known as generous. Such a common desire when you give, to make sure that others know when you give. To make sure others know how much you give! To make sure others know that you give.

Jesus says, "Don't do any of that." Don't sound the trumpet, because that becomes hypocrisy! When you give to help someone in need, it ceases to be an act of righteousness if you do it for your own benefit. An act of righteousness turns into an act of hypocrisy when your motive is selfish. Pride turns a good work into evil.

So don't blow your own horn! In the wisdom of,
Prov. 27:2 "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth;

a stranger, and not your own lips."

Don't parade your righteousness in order to be seen by others. In fact,
v.3-4a

Let me give you an example of how that works, in a positive sense. Consider,

Mat. 25:34 "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38 When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'"

They didn't even remember! They couldn't even recall. When praised by God, they couldn't even identify the occasion. "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?" Jesus' answer needs to penetrate your soul, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."

So totally absent is the thought of self-advancement, so foreign to them is the whole notion of pride, that as they stood before Jesus, they simply didn't remember the good that they had done. Is that realistic? Is that possible? By God's grace, yes it is. It must be. God can make humble those who are proud. In

fact, he intends to do so. That's why we read these words from Jesus in this sermon on the mount.

The practical implication is clear. Let your giving be done in secret. So, as a church, we don't ask for pledges. Our treasurer records your giving, essentially so that you can get a receipt for your taxes, but you need to be careful even of that motivation. For if you give money to the church motivated by the tax benefits, you have not kept your left hand from knowing what your right hand is doing. I'm not telling you to refuse that tax deduction, and I have utilized it myself, but beware the attitude of the heart. Beware the motivation of the soul. Beware the pursuit of your own benefit in the giving of your tithes and offerings.

In that context, our government might well eliminate that tax deduction for charitable giving. And although I hope that they don't, and I believe it is a good thing for the government to actually encourage charitable giving with that deduction, if they took it away, it should not affect your contributions. Not if your left hand doesn't know what your right hand is doing.

I believe that same danger can creep into the motivation for designated giving as well, for while the Scripture says to "bring the whole tithe into the storehouse," too often we are motivated by our own sense of importance and control. We want to control our giving by determining exactly and precisely how it is spent. How easily would that situation come into conflict with Jesus' words here in our text.

v.1 "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them....2 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. 3 But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 that your charitable deed may be in secret."

So don't parade your acts of righteousness before others. And,

B. Don't seek the praise of others in order to please yourself.

That's the underlying motive Jesus is addressing. That's where the charge of hypocrisy is made in verse 2. It is the hypocrites who sound the trumpet. It is the hypocrites who seek to please others, in order to exalt themselves. And the key phrase in verse 2 that exposes the hypocrisy are those words, "that they may have glory from men."

There is one thing about which I have always desired to remain ignorant, and that is the individual, personal record of giving in the church. I see the bottom line, because as an Elder, I need to be part of the Session in overseeing all the tithes that come into the storehouse. But under no conditions do I want to know who gives what. And as far as I can judge my own heart and motives, it means nothing to me.

Now, those who are stingy ought to be rebuked and corrected. And those who are generous? Well, those sorts of people tend to be obvious in all the best ways. What a marvelous reputation many of God's people have who have been blessed with worldly riches, who show themselves to be generous. But, of course, it is not they who make their generosity known. It is not they who parade their own righteousness. It is, rather, their reputation that speaks for them.

So Paul writes to Timothy,

1 Tim. 6:17 “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”

But beware beloved, beware the danger of hypocrisy. The danger of seeking the praise of others in order to advance your own importance. For if you seek the praise of others, you will most likely obtain it. But that is all that you will get.

v.2 “Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”

You are to seek another reward. You are to,

C. Always seek the praise of God alone.

Let your giving be in secret, Jesus says. Let your acts of righteousness be done in secret, as it were, without any thought of your own glory through the praise of others, for this very reason, as we read in,

v.4b “...and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.”

We will see the same thing with prayer and then with regard to fasting,

Mat. 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.”

Mat. 6:17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”

More broadly, turn with me to,

Heb. 4:13 “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”

That is given as a warning, to be sure. Our accountability before God is a necessary constraint upon our sense of freedom to indulge in sin. But that verse can also be an encouragement. We must give an account to God, but if you do well, if you do acts of righteousness, God will judge them with his favor. And with his reward!

So all your good works, which you keep to yourself, are known to God. “And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Is it wrong to be motivated by the anticipation of reward? No its not. Not when you pursue the praise of God alone. Not when you pursue the advancement of his glory. We read this in,

1 Cor. 3:11 “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.”

But in that context of reward, always seek the praise of God alone. As we end, consider,

Gal. 1:10 “For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.”

So please consider your own heart and always be aware of this warning against pride. Always beware this temptation to the hypocrisy of seeking to do what is good in order to make yourself

look good. By God's grace, put to death such sinful motivations and seek the praise of God in all that you do. Seek the praise and glory of Jesus in all things. Seek the praise and glory of Jesus by doing what is good, by the practice of your own righteousness. Let the motives of hypocrisy and pride be replaced by that motive that Paul so well expresses in,

Rom. 11:36 "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen."