

Sermon Series: Spurred on to Holiness (and Power) by Immersing Ourselves into the Life of Christ Through the Eyes of the Apostles – A Harmony of All Four Gospels

Sermon Title: “Don’t Let Your Left Hand Know What Your Right Hand is Doing. Practicing Godly Righteousness While Not Being Noticed. Matthew 6:1-8

February 24, 2019

Theme verse: Acts 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. (ESV)

Today’s Scripture: Matthew 6:1–8 “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.

“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. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“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. 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.

“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. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (ESV)

Introduction:

Main point: Disciplines of the Christian life, such as praying, giving and fasting are of no eternal value if done with skewed motives.

Context:

Exegesis

1. Jesus assumes that His followers will give, and pray and fast.
 - Why do we think these disciplines are optional, especially fasting and giving to the poor?
 - Show me the person who thinks that eating food is a non-essential for a healthy body. Yet I can show you many who feel that giving and praying and fasting are non-essential to the Christian life.
 - Let’s start with giving. Giving to the Lord as required and to the poor as required

enable me to continuously slay my greed dragon/idol. Who here hasn't at some point in their lives bowed down to the Greenback idol and swore allegiance. It shows up in so many ways.

- "I can't give to the poor or to the Lord because I'm too far in debt." Or
 - "I can't spend my money on that charity because they spend too much on overhead, very little goes to the needy". Then stop contributing to the Clinton Foundation!!
 - Or, "People need to learn how to get along with less, that's how I did it."
 - Or, "They're just going to waste that money on cigarettes or beer anyway". Or
 - "See that guy over there on the highway who says he's a disabled vet, I bet he makes \$50,000 a year panhandling like that.
- Let's discuss praying. I've done a series on this, main point of that series. . . don't make your prayer-life legalistic. Make it relational, personal, a dialogue a conversation like you would with a friend. Keep your prayer list but if you can talk to the Father about those issues as if you were talking to a very rich, powerful, wise counselor and friend.
 - Now fasting. Jesus expects this will be automatic. Normal. Regular. The Israelites had special days in their calendar for fasting. In chronological order they are : 1) The Fast of the Firstborn on Nisan 14 (the day before Passover begins) all first born sons fast to commemorate they were spared on that Passover night (March/April), 2) Fast of the 17th of Tammuz, when Moses broke the tablets of stone and when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple (April/May), 3) The Ninth of Av, commemorating all the Jewish sufferings (May/June) 4) The fast of Gedaliah (Sept/Oct.) 5) Yom Kippur Day of Atonement (October 8 this year), 6) The 10th of Tevet commemorating the fall of Jerusalem (December/January) 7) The Fast of Esther (February/March).
 - Do we have scheduled fast days in our calendar and if not why not? Jesus told us that we would be fasting in between his resurrection and second coming? So when? Good Friday to Resurrection Sunday? Perhaps if we did, this would make our Resurrection Sunday celebrations that much more impactful and appreciative.
 - I would suggest fasting at least one day a week if you're healthy enough to do it. The Jewish way was from dusk to dusk.

2. Jesus assumes His followers will want to be rewarded for their good deeds.

- Do we do good things only because we expect to receive a reward? Or do we help others without thinking of any reward?
- If the reward is somehow material (which it is not) or high praise (well done good and faithful servant) or authority over cities and angels (Matthew 25 and 1 Corinthians 6) wouldn't our motives be tainted or impure? But,
- What if the praise and authority are necessary on God's part? He has to give rewards.

First of all He has promised them, and secondly at least to some degree we allowed the Holy Spirit to work His righteousness in us to the point that the righteousness for God was seen so we had a part in it, sort of and in some sense these rewards were earned. But, let's go deeper. . .

- What if, our goal was to grow closer to God and enjoy His presence and filling and that was our starting point. What if that desire gave way to greater filling and greater desire to see God glorified in this world by our good deeds? What if those good deeds brought greater glory to God in the eyes of those who praise God for the reception of the good deeds brought about by a Jesus follower. What if that praise produced a greater desire for the individual to grow even closer to God to see more of his presence and power and more of his righteousness? See the circle? Where in this circle is the reward? How about all of the above?
- This changes the dynamic from one of law to love. From earning to loving. By asking ourselves the question, "Why am I doing this?" we will get much closer to the motive.

3. Jesus encourages us to make sure our motives are pure by doing what we do for God's glory and not our own. The two illustrations.

- Giving to the poor. *"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.* I believe Jesus was being sarcastic here. Were there actual trumpets being sounded when money was put into the offering plate? Probably not. Some say the trumpet like containers used to collect alms made noise and the more coins thrown in the more noise they made, but that wouldn't work for giving to the poor in the streets. Maybe our phrase "Toot your own horn" came from this idea that they boasted about how much they gave loudly enough so that others could hear.
 - The way this might work is for a hypocrite to walk through the streets of Jerusalem until he saw a beggar with the largest crowd around him and people he knew in the crowd and when everyone was looking he would hand the beggar a quarter at a time one after the other until he had given a total of five dollars. That would be twenty trips of his fingers from money bag to beggar's hands just so everyone would see.
 - How would one give so the honor goes to God so that left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing? By finding a beggar with few around and no one who knows you and reaching into the money bag not knowing how much is being taken out nor what kind of coins so that the left hand holding the bag really doesn't have a clue as to how much is given.
- Praying in public. Three times a day Jews were encouraged to pray just like Daniel did, like morning noon and night. How does one pray for his own glory? Well if the shofar sounds at noon and a man is eating lunch at home he might want to run out into the busy street and act if he was there all along so that he could lift up his hands to heaven and pray his words loudly enough for two city blocks to hear. And he could repeat phrases over and over again to make his prayer even longer as if someone were watching with a stopwatch to see if his prayer was longer than necessary.
 - There used to be a lot more of this happening when prayer was important to

the church and people would come to pray and I would hear people change from a normal voice to a deeper voice and their language would change from modern English to King James with lots of Thees and Thous.

- But this command to keep our Good deeds quiet seems to contradict with Matthew 5:16 which says: *“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. (ESV)* There is no contradiction here if you know what Jesus is trying to get us to do. In 5:16 we may be tempted to hide our good deeds out of fear of persecution and in 6:1 we may want to display them for our own glory. The difference is this: who gets the glory. A.B. Bruce said it best years ago when he said “Show when tempted to hide, Hide when tempted to show”.

Application

1. Start practicing the spiritual disciplines if you haven't yet begun.
2. Stop thinking about what other people think. People pleasing is another name for people worship which is another name for idolatry. We shrink back way too often because of what people might think. Dean mentioned that in this cold weather he offers a ride to anyone he sees walking. Sorry Dean. . .My response was “I'll start doing that as long as the person walking is a male. If I got caught being seen with a strange female in the Suburban well, what would people say? If you have those tinge of feelings sometimes, ignore them. I can't do that as easily as you but you can.