

Living Before God's Eyes (Matt 6.1)

I. REVIEW: ORIENTING OUR LIVES TOWARD GOD'S KINGDOM

- A. The Sermon on the Mount is the most comprehensive teaching from Jesus on the role of the believer in cooperating with the grace of God. To pursue a life built around obedience to the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is to build a life that has sure and sturdy foundations that will not be shaken in times of trial and testing.
- B. Jesus invites his followers to intentionally order our lives around these teachings. It is not enough to hear the words of Jesus and accept them, we are invited to *obey* them through intentionally pursuing cooperation with God's grace in response to his teaching.
- C. The Sermon on the Mount begins with Jesus' statement about the value-system of the kingdom of heaven. The eight "beatitudes" operate like invitations into holding and embodying the things that are truly great in God's economy and kingdom. These are like fruits that we must cultivate by the grace of God in partnership with the Spirit's activity in our lives. They are supernatural gifts that are given and grown.
- D. Another way to think about values is to talk about the ideas of satisfaction and fulfillment (what is the "good life"). Every society in human history has presented a picture of what it believes will provide true and lasting satisfaction (wholeness, happiness, joy, etc.) to people. Humans are hard-wired to orient our lives around what we believe will provide us the most true and lasting fulfillment. Whatever we picture in our minds as providing us ultimate happiness (money, status, freedom, etc.) will be the things we orient our actions around attaining.
- E. These eight fruits are the "litmus test" for our growth in grace and godliness. In many ways, these are the measure of our real and true impact in the kingdom of God — not the size and scope of our ministry or the number of disciples we convert/make/etc. Possessing these fruits (and seeing them grow) define a life of love and spiritual maturity that is at the heart of a life oriented around God's kingdom.
- F. We desire to be individuals (and a church family) whose lives are built upon the value system of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus promises that those who *hear* and *practice* his words in the Sermon on the Mount — particularly the call to the blessed life outlined in the beatitudes — will have a sure and steady foundation built upon the rock. This foundation will not be shaken when the storms of life come and test our lives.
- G. Each of these eight markers runs counter to the ways that the world defines success, growth, maturity, and greatness. Because of this, we must *intentionally* and *consistently* reorient our lives by God's grace to see these realities as truly blessed. If our minds and hearts are captivated by the cares of this life, or by the patterns of this world (what our culture/age defines as valuable), then we will not see these realities as markers of a blessed life before God.

II. BE PERFECT (MATT 5.48)

- A. Jesus concluded the previous section (Matt 5.21-48) outlining six areas of temptation that we are to actively resist by exhorting his hearers to embody a greater righteousness than was being taught by the Scribes and Pharisees (cf. Matt 5.20). Rather than simply enacting an external righteousness, Jesus is inviting his disciples to be cleansed in the depths of their hearts by his forgiving power, and to walk in obedience and purity in the secret and hidden places of the heart by his grace.
- B. The call to *be perfect* is not Jesus giving a new law or a new measuring stick by which his disciples were to gain right standing with God. The Greek word (*teleios*) speaks of wholeness, uprightness, and completeness, not an idea of sinless perfection.

- C. Jesus invites his disciples to pursue *wholehearted obedience* to God in every area of their lives — thought, word, and deed.
- D. To be wholehearted means that there are not areas of sin that we are complacent with. We cannot live in compromise in any area of our lives and presume upon God’s future grace.
- E. This does not mean that we necessarily have victory over every area of sin in our lives, simply that we are giving Jesus our “all” in every area he has illuminated to us by his Spirit. To give our “all” means we pursue obedience with a posture of *repentance* (naming sin as sin), *confidence* (receiving God’s free gift of righteousness in Christ Jesus), and *actively waging war* (setting our hearts to obey empowered by his grace).
- F. To pursue this heart posture is to pursue a life of true “blessedness” (i.e., satisfaction, joy, wholeness). Walking in a spirit of obedience leads to a vibrant heart and true joy in the grace of God.

III. PURSUING THE MEANS OF GRACE (MATT 6.1-21)

- A. Matthew 6 continues to follow the invitation of Jesus for his disciples to embody a greater (internal) righteousness than the Scribes and Pharisees. The previous section (Matt 5.21-47) outlined six areas of temptation and sin that must be *actively resisted*. The coming section is used to outline several means of grace that his disciples are to *actively pursue* in partnership with his grace.
- B. To understand this section, we must understand that God has ordained specific and particular means through which his people are to experience more of his grace. We are to pursue these activities with confidence before him — not as a means to *earn* his favor, but as a means to posture ourselves to receive more from him freely (e.g., breathing, eating, etc.).
- C. In coming to any discussion on pursuing the means of grace we must first remember that we are fully accepted as righteous before God in and through the merit of Jesus Christ alone. Our efforts do not *earn* God’s favor or his blessing. Rather, our efforts are expressions of our submission and our trust in him. These pursuits are active ways that our hearts can be reoriented around what he says is good, right, and valuable.

⁶But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (Jas 4.6)

⁷Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain (2 Cor 6.1)
- D. Dallas Willard rightly notes that “*grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action.*”
- E. Jesus invites us to pursue specific practices that position our hearts more readily to experience the power of his transforming and empowering grace.

IV. BEFORE THE EYES OF GOD

- A. In this section Jesus then reorients both *how* his disciples are to pursue these means (before the eyes of God) and *why* (to receive true reward).
- B. In inviting his disciples to walk in a manner that is “whole” (single, wholehearted, complete) before God, Jesus does not tell them to stop pursuing righteous practices. Rather, he reorients first *how* they are to walk out these practices before his eyes alone.
- C. In this statement, Jesus demonstrates that the way his disciples are to orient their pursuits before God is in order to do them before his eyes alone. He warns us to not practice our righteousness before the eyes of men in order that we would be seen by them. Later, he warns us against “sounding a trumpet” when engaging in such religious activities (i.e., not drawing attention to ourselves, our dedication, or our zeal). Rather, we are invited to live before the eyes of God alone.

- D. Jesus here teaches that God sees in the “secret places” (i.e., the hidden place of the heart). Understanding this truth radically reorients how we determine our value, success, and worth.
- E. Closely tied to this truth is the revelation that God has given throughout his word that **he does not evaluate like men evaluate**. This means that God does not define success, worth, value, or importance with the same ‘metrics’ that we do.

⁷But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord does not see as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” (1 Sam 16.7)

⁹For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless (perfect) toward him. (2 Chrn 16.9)

- F. Men are driven to evaluate success by outward appearances. This is a fleshly way of defining and evaluating greatness and value and is not in accordance with God’s heart. This text invites us to understand that there are various ways of “seeing”:
 1. **Positive externals:** performance, accomplishments, skills, position, stature, training, wealth, education, fame, networks, etc. To orient ourselves in accordance with positive externals will keep us in a constant “rat race” of trying to position ourselves before others in order to attain the things that we see and valuable. This will keep our hearts bound by *ambition* and *striving*.
 2. **Negative externals:** lack of gifting, spiritual failures, immaturity, lack of position, honor, power, etc. To orient ourselves in accordance with negative externals will keep us in a constant spirit of “judgment” toward others who we deem less important to us. To evaluate others (and ourselves) with fleshly eyes in relation to the negative will lead either to *pride* (as we evaluate others who do not live up to our standards) or *shame* (when we do not live up to our own standards).
 3. **Internal (heart) reality:** God evaluates based on the *intentions* and *movements* of the heart. The only way to experience a free heart and confidence before God in love is to be given the gift of evaluating in accordance with God’s way of seeing.
- G. Throughout this section Jesus teaches that pursuing these seemingly small activities before God’s eyes will be **noticed** by God and will be **rewarded** by God.
- H. Each of these pursuits is profoundly weak and seemingly insignificant. This is a liberating reality because it invites us to see that the “playing field” has been leveled for us to pursue significance in God’s kingdom *regardless* of our external situations.
- I. Most people will live all of their lives making very little impact in the eyes of men. However, God evaluates our lives not based on external successes (size and scope) but on the movements of the heart. This reorients our lives to understand that the most seemingly insignificant activities (according to the evaluation of men) can become **eternally significant** based on the posture and movements of the heart.
- J. We are all hardwired with a longing for greatness, success, and worth. We cannot repent these longings away. We can only reorient *where* we seek to find them.
- K. Later in the New Testament, Paul exhorts the Ephesians to not work for the **eye-service** of others. To recognize who you ‘work for’ answers the questions: *who do I look to?* And *who do I want to look at me?* A litmus test for how much our hearts live before the eyes of God in secret is to gauge the level of your offense when you pour out and you go unnoticed, you are criticized, or you are opposed.

⁶not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸knowing whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free (Eph 6.6-8)

- L. Jesus' teaching throughout this section demonstrates that God cares immensely about the choices we make in hidden places — when no one is watching.

V. THE REWARDS OF THE FATHER

- A. Jesus contrasts two *rewards* that we can run after through the choices of our lives. We can either run after receiving the reward in the eyes of men (affirmation, reverence, acceptance, etc.) or receiving our reward in the eyes of God the Father.
- B. Jesus declares that the Father who sees all that happens in the secret will see what we have done in secret and reward his followers openly.
- C. In a similar manner, Paul declares that God will one day bring to light all of the small, hidden, and even imperceptible movements of the heart made toward God and give commendation because of them.

²it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. ³But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ⁴For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God (1 Cor 4.2-5)

- D. How do we make sense of the “rewards” Jesus is talking about here?

1. **Internal:** the primary experience of rewards in this age is experienced internally. We experience more of God's manifest presence, his life, his love, and his power. We long for our *living condition* to more adequately reflect and align with our *eternal position* in the economy of God.
2. **External:** although not primary, there are measures of external blessings that we will experience in our circumstances (family, relationships, financial, etc.) as we pursue obedience and devotion in secret. These are not the *primary* focus of our lives but are to be received with thanksgiving and humility when given.
3. **Eternal:** there are also eternal aspects of our reward before God. Those who build upon the foundation of Christ with gold, silver, and precious metal will experience delight in the Lord for all eternity. Some will experience loss and regret at the judgment seat because of building with faulty materials. (Jonathan Edwards compared eternal rewards to the size of our cup)

¹²Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw — ¹³each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Cor 3.12-15)

¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (2 Cor 4.10)

- E. Many believers struggle with the concept of *working* for eternal rewards. However, Jesus unapologetically teaches on the reality of rewards in the economy of heaven (e.g., Matt 10.31-32; 16.27; 18.4; 19.21; Luke 9.48; 12.21; 14.11; 18.14; 22.26-30; John 12.26; Rev 2.7, 10-11; 3.4-5, 9, 11-12, 21; 19.7-8; 22.12).
- F. We must set our hearts to be pleasing before the eyes of God. We desire to receive all that he will give us — both in this age and in the age to come. To not recognize the importance of orienting our labors toward living before his eyes is to misunderstand and misappropriate God's grace freely given in Christ Jesus.