

Giving (Matt 6.1-4)

I. REVIEW

- A. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is inviting his disciples into a greater experience of the blessed life (whole, complete, fulfilled, satisfied). This is centered around the eight beatitudes (Matt 5.3-12), which are the most succinct portrait of the values of the kingdom of heaven. The presence and growth of these virtues are the mark of our discipleship (Matt 5.13-16) and the measure of true and lasting greatness (Matt 5.17-20).
- B. At the heart of the Sermon is the call for Jesus' disciples to *be perfect* as the Father in heaven is perfect. This is a call for wholehearted obedience to God in every area of our lives — thought, word, and deed.
- C. In chapter 6, Jesus outlines several practices (means of grace) that are to be **actively pursued** as we seek to cultivate the beatitudes in our lives.
- D. Jesus is not concerned to do away with means of grace — rather he is concerned to reorient **how** we pursue them (before the eyes of God alone) and **why** we pursue them (for true, lasting reward).

II. PURSUING THE MEANS OF GRACE

- A. 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.).
- B. 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)

- C. One of the dynamic realities of understanding these means outlined in Matthew 6 is to see that they are all invitations to pursue voluntary expressions of **weakness**. In each of these pursuits we give up something that we generally understand as strength (money, time, control, personal rights, food, etc.) in order to more regularly align ourselves with our true dependence.
- D. We are all prone to utilize the resources that God has given us to prop ourselves up in order to not be aware of our weakness and our need. Jesus invites us to regularly *empty* ourselves of our strengths before his eyes in order that we might more consistently and fully experience his grace.
- E. Each of these pursuits is intended to bring us more in line with the reality of our *poverty of spirit*. No one who pursues these practices consistently (and with a right spirit) will feel strong in themselves. Yet, it is precisely in these places of weakness that we grow in our experience of God's power and grace. The poor in spirit are said to *now* possess the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5.3).

III. A BIBLICAL VIEW OF MONEY

- A. The first practice that Jesus discusses in Matthew 6 is the issue of *giving to the needy* (6.2). From the jump, Jesus is intending to get straight to the heart of his disciples and invite them to orient their righteous deeds before his eyes in order to experience more of his grace and power.

- B. The issue of money is often one of the most difficult issues for Christians to understand and deal with rightly. There are often three general wrong dispositions people carry related to finances in the kingdom.
1. **Prosperity:** some Christians believe that the Bible teaches that God desires for us to be wealthy. This is a *distortion* of the Bible's teaching on prosperity and the blessing of God. The Bible does teach that there are principles for stewarding wealth in a way that leads to greater experiences of wealth and prosperity (i.e., Proverbs). However, this can easily become distorted to believing that God gives us wealth *primarily* for our own ease, comfort, enjoyment, etc.
 2. **Poverty:** other Christians believe that to walk in obedience to the teachings of Jesus in the Scriptures requires that they adopt a poverty mindset toward finances. This way of living in the world adopts an adversarial relationship toward any semblance of wealth and money and evaluates success before the eyes of God on the basis of lack.
 3. **Avoidance:** the difficulty of the issue of walking with a Biblically informed/faithful approach to money often leads many Christians to simply avoiding the issue all together. They do not think much about their finances, what they mean, or how to steward them toward the glory of God.
- C. What we need to see is that neither extreme understands the full picture of what the Bible teaches related to money. The Bible invites us to see money as a gift that is given to us by God to be stewarded in the posture of relationship with the one who gives abundantly and freely *while* being on guard against the pervasiveness of sin and distortion that grows in our hearts related to money.
- D. The Bible invites us to embody principles of joy-filled *simplicity, generosity, contentedness, and sacrifice* at the heart of how we are to understand our relationship to money.
- E. A Biblical ideal for wealth would be to *possess enough resource for our basic needs with the ability to give generously for the sake of investment in God's kingdom.*

⁸But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. (1 Tim 6.8)

¹⁸You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. (Deut 8.18)

- F. The Scriptures commandments related to money are almost *entirely* related to the posture of the heart — not on commands related to specifics (i.e., what percentage to give, what to spend on specific things, etc.). This is because God has designed stewardship of our resources to exist within a life of communion and relationship with him — not as a measuring stick by which our life before him is evaluated (i.e., like a law).

IV. LOVING GOD WITH OUR FINANCES

- A. Money is one of the most powerful ways to *discern what we love*. The fact that it is a limited resource in our lives (i.e., you can only spend a dollar once) invites us to see that we can tell a lot about what we value by looking at our finances.
- B. The Sermon on the Mount, at its heart, is about reorienting our lives around the value system of the kingdom of heaven. This means that there will be profound implications on our resources (time, energy, money, etc.) as we seek to live in a wholehearted manner before the Lord.
- C. Many people do not understand that faithful stewardship of our money is one of the most potent places where we can express love for God (and others) in our lives. It is easy for believers to fall prey to the lie that we can simply add Jesus to our current value systems and leave things (like our use of money) unchanged. The teachings of Jesus invite us to follow him in discipleship and fully and wholly reorient our value systems around his — this will have profound results on how we see and steward our finances.

- D. This requires that we become thoughtful and prayerful about *how* we use our money before the eyes of God. The Biblical teaching on money is not “how do I posture myself to get the most I can in order to use it for my own comfort, pleasure, ease, etc.” Rather, the Biblical teaching on money is “how do I posture myself to relate to the heart of God in my finances?”
- E. To evaluate how we spend our money touches on so many places of fear, anxiety, and insecurity that we possess. Jesus invites us to grow in loving response to him (faith) by trusting him in the area of our finances.
- F. One of the realities of the practice of giving invites us into is cultivating a history of *relationship* with God in the area of finances. Many believers do not have an active history of communion with God around this issue. Demonstrating our love to him in putting ourselves into a position of *voluntary weakness* moves him and positions us to receive more of his grace in our lives.

V. WHEN YOU GIVE TO THE NEEDY

²Thus, 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. (Matt 6.2)

- A. Jesus begins the exposition on the means of grace with the concept of giving to the needy. In the context of the day, this would have likely spoken of alms that were given on behalf of the poor.
- B. One of the remarkable realities that Jesus implies in this statement is that there is a continued *expectation* for his disciples to give generously in order to meet the needs of the poor around them.
- C. Throughout the Old Testament, there was a specific emphasis on taking care of the poor among the people of God (Deut 15.7, 11; Prov 19.17; 22.9). This principle is not removed within the new covenant family, but the way in which we are to walk this out is redefined in light of Jesus’ teachings (Gal 2.10; 1 Tim 6.18).
- D. It is also important to understand that Jesus is not here specifically talking about the Biblical idea of tithing as an act of trust and faith in the provision of God. Throughout the Scripture (and the practice of church history), the principle of tithing is an act of obedience that is intended to reorient our hearts toward *grateful acknowledgment* of God’s generous provision and *dependent trust* that he will continue to provide for us.
- E. Jesus is here talking about specific acts of mercy (the Greek word could be rendered ‘mercy-minded’) through which we use our resources to meet the needs of others.
- F. Jesus warns his disciples to not perform their acts of mercy in order to receive the praise and accolades of men. This leads us to see that much of the religious leadership of the day had come to *perform* such righteous practices in order to be seen as righteous (virtuous) in the eyes of others.
- G. Jesus declares that such giving is *hypocrisy* (‘play acting’) as it is done solely for the attention and reverence of men. It is not truly righteous because the heart is neither concerned with God’s glory nor the need of another.

VI. RECEIVING THE FATHER’S REWARDS

³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

- A. Rather than perform our virtue for the eyes of a watching world, Jesus invites his disciples into a different way of acting with a heart of mercy. He invites his disciples to do such actions simply for the eyes of God, in order to be truly rewarded by him.
- B. In order to do this, he exhorts them to not even let their left hand know what the right hand is doing. This is a graphic way of showing that we are not even to do our acts of mercy in order to congratulate ourselves.

- C. Jesus promises that the Father will **reward** those who are generous with their resources (specifically time and money). We must have a vision for the true rewards that come at the hand of God in order for our labors to be done in faith before him.
- D. **Internal:** The primary way we experience the *reward* of the Father in response to these activities in this life is through a greater experience of his grace *internally* in our lives. As we live before his eyes (and give of ourselves — our money, time, energy) we will experience more of God’s manifest presence, his life, his love, and his power. This is not a one-for-one exchange — but over time we will experience more life on our hearts.
- E. **External:** One of the difficult realities of understanding the reward of the Father is seeking to rightly understand external expressions of this in our lives in this age. To experience the provision of the Lord in our lives is not the primary pursuit, but God does use external blessing to show us that he sees the movements of our hearts and cares.

1. God promises to provide for the needs of his people as we seek first his kingdom.

³³But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things (the needs of this life) will be added to you. (Matt 6.33)

2. God promises to open the “windows of heaven” and respond to his people in this area.

¹⁰Bring the full tithe into the storehouse... and thereby put me to the test, says the Lord, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. ¹¹I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil... (Mal 3.10-11)

3. God promises to give back to us according to the measure of our giving.

³⁸give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you. (Luke 6.38)

- F. **Eternal:** there are eternal aspects of our reward in the eyes of God. The Bible is full of places that speak of our use of earthly wealth as a *training ground* for eternal wealth.

¹⁷Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed (Prov 19.17)

¹⁰One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. ¹¹If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? (Luke 16.10-11)

VII. RESPONDING IN HUMBLE TRUST

- A. **Make specific commitments to give:** if you are just beginning your journey here, you must see that giving is *not optional* in the economy of God’s kingdom. Set yourself to begin giving of the firstfruits of your income to the Lord. We must remember that the cost of non-discipleship is greater than the cost of discipleship!
- B. **Start talking to God about your money:** our finances should be a regular part of our dialogue with the Lord. Ask the Lord to change the way you *see* money (i.e., moving from consumption to stewardship; from comfort and control to eternal investment). Ask God to make clear to you what are your *needs*, your *desires*, your *excesses*, etc. Ask him to burn away things from your life now that hinder obedience and greater love.
- C. **Ask God to build your ‘personal history’ with him in this area:** we long to grow our personal history with God in relation to finances. Not because we want to live extravagant lifestyles of excess and comfort, but because we want to grow in the certainty that his eyes are on us and that he cares for us (both in his power to provide for us and in the reality that our choices *matter* to him).