

## Self-centered or Secret Giving Matthew 6:1-4

We know **Matthew 5-7** as the Sermon on the Mount. What Jesus teaches in these three chapters are a summary of everything He teaches throughout His ministry years. In **5:17-20** Jesus says He didn't come to abolish or do away with the law or the prophets, He came to fulfill them. When He says He came to fulfill them, He means that He came to give what was taught in the Old Testament meaning. He wanted to emphasize the principles of what was in the Old Testament to help His audience see that total commitment was the requirement, not just an external obedience. Don't just go through the motions of pretending to be religious by obeying the law and the prophets, actually obey the law and the prophets out of a genuine heart and love for God.

He follows that thought with their false view of murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, and even their attitude about their enemies. He shows them the fallacy of the kind of religion they were practicing by pointing out that they had been following manmade rules with these words: **"you have heard it said."** He's saying that the traditions they were following weren't grounded in Scripture, but instead had been twisted by those who taught them. But then He corrects their false thinking with words that point them back to the truth of Scripture: **"But I tell you the truth."**

We have all been told something growing up that wasn't based on truth, but we believed it.  
If you handle a toad, you'll get warts.  
You'll get sick if you go outside with wet hair.  
If you swallow gum, it will stay in your stomach for seven years.  
You can't swim for an hour after eating.  
You lose more body heat through your head than anywhere else.  
Cracking your knuckles will give you arthritis.

Jesus says this is what you've been taught, but I'm here to set things straight by telling you what the real truth is. What you've been practicing, what you believe to be true, isn't. What I tell you is the truth.

This morning we are jumping to **Matthew 6**, not because the rest of **chapter 5** is not relevant, but because Jesus wants them to consider their true motivation behind what they do, how they worship, why they obey. In **verses 1-18** Jesus asks them to consider the real motivation for their worship in the areas of giving, praying, and fasting. We will look at each one separately. Today we'll look at giving.

Let's read out loud together **Matthew 6:1-4**.

Now, hold your place there and turn back to **Matthew 5:16** which we looked at this last week as part of the message. **"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."**

**Matthew 6:1** seems to contradict **Matthew 5:16**. **"Don't do your acts of righteousness to be seen by men."** **"Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works."**

**Are your works a visible demonstration of your faith? Can people see that you're different by how you live in your actions and attitudes and words?**

There ought to be a clear distinction between us and those who aren't saved that is visible because we are a new creation in Christ. Out of what Christ has done for us, our response is to be the hands and feet of Jesus to others. Notice again what it says in **6:1** which seems to contradict what Jesus said in **5:16**. **"Don't let your acts of righteousness be seen by men."** versus **"Let them see your good works."**

To be clear, I think the emphasis in **5:16** isn't on our good works, but on our being light. Our good works are just a natural response of the light we are shining for Christ. Light naturally draws attention to something. James points this out when he says show me your faith without good works and I'll show you my faith with my good works. **So how do we let our light shine so others see our good works and yet not let our acts of righteousness be seen by others?**

Let's first be clear that in **Matthew 6**, Jesus is giving a warning about our motivation behind our public acts. **What's the reason behind it?**

## I. A WARNING ABOUT OUR MOTIVE BEHIND OUR PUBLIC ACT – vv. 1-2

It really boils down to one word and that word is PRIDE. We may not want to admit it, but let's be honest, there is a part of us that likes to be noticed. We like people to see what we do. We like seeing our name in the paper. We like the accolades. We like the pats on the back. We may even get a little put out when we do something and don't get some form of recognition. But pride has an "I" problem. It's like the vocalist tuning up his voice before the performance by singing "ME, ME, ME, ME, ME." [A roommate I had in college would stand in front of the mirror as he was getting ready for class and sing "I think I love me."](#)

Even after we are saved, there is still a problem with pride. It's human nature. Self still wants to be king. Self wants the attention because we want to be rewarded.

If we want the promotion, we want to appear like we're working really hard when the boss comes by. If we want the athletic scholarship, we want the scout to see us.

Professionals help write your resume so that you get the attention of a prospective employer.

Again, it all goes back to pride which fuels one's motivation and Jesus gives them a stern warning. Now notice that He isn't condemning acts of righteousness. He's not saying you shouldn't do good works. He's condemning the motivation behind them, wanting others to see what you are doing and say "my what a good boy you are." It's a warning to check our real reason behind why we're doing what we're doing.

Now before we go any further, let's be clear that acts of righteousness Jesus is talking about here has nothing to do with salvation. It's quite obvious from [Ephesians 2:8-9](#) that nothing we do can merit eternal life. Salvation is not based on anything we do. It's all about grace through faith. God bestows on us the gift of eternal life solely on Christ's finished work on the cross and nothing else. Either we believe it and receive the gift of salvation by faith, or we reject it. It is not grace plus works. It is

grace alone. [Titus 3:5](#) makes an even clearer statement that it is not by works of righteousness by which we are saved but by the work of the Holy Spirit who appropriates the finished work of Christ to our faith and transforms us from slavery to sin into the kingdom of God. Righteousness simply means having a right standing with God.

**Romans 5:1-2** "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."

So let's be clear that acts of righteousness don't make us righteous, they are the result or the outworking of our righteousness. They are not the means that make us right with God, they are the measure by which others see we are right with God. They are the visible acts that people see because of our faith.

Jesus is not telling His audience not to do acts of righteousness, He's warning them about the motive behind why they do them.

Now the word in the KJV is "**alms.**" Alms are more than money. It can also be tangible goods given to or acts done for those who are in need of some kind of charity. In the Greek the same word is sometimes translated as pity or mercy. The original meaning is that when you give alms you are showing mercy.

When it comes down to it, alms or acts of righteousness are a form of service. When you give to someone else whatever it might be whether it's a monetary gift or something else that meets a tangible need, you are serving them. But the rub is in the motivation behind what you are doing or giving. **Why are you doing it?** If you're giving for the purpose of pretending to be righteous, trying to appear pious, for the purpose of being noticed, then Jesus says it's with the wrong motive. You can fool some of the people most of the time and most of the people some of the time, but you can never fool God about the real reason of your almsgiving. He knows your heart, He knows your motive. He knows whether or not what you are doing is genuine. He sees the real reason behind your action.

Almsgiving has been at the heart of the Judeo-Christian ethic for centuries. Unlike other religions that require good deeds as a meritorious event to earn their version of salvation or heaven, as I said a moment ago, we do good works to show we are saved not to become saved. Alms are what we do because God both commends it, and commands it.

**Proverbs 14:31 “Whoever is kind to the needy honors God.”**

**Proverbs 19:17 “He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward him for what he has done.”**

**Proverbs 22:9 “A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.”**

Providing for those in need has always been a part of God’s plan for His followers to be His hands and feet among the needy. It was a practice built into the Old Testament Law. Giving alms was not only commended by God, that He approves such giving, it was also commanded by Him.

**Exodus 23:10-11 “For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.”**

**Leviticus 19:9-10 “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God.”**

That’s exactly what we find Boaz doing for the poor as the story of Ruth unfolds.

Going back to what I said earlier, Jesus isn’t condemning the act of doing good deeds. It’s quite obvious that is something we are to do. What Jesus warns about is the reason behind our acts of righteousness. When it’s all said and done, there are only two reasons we give. We either give to glorify ourselves or we give to glorify God. Either our

giving is from a heart that is genuine or a heart that is disingenuous and deceptive. **What is truly at the heart of our action?**

There’s a word tucked in the verse to pay attention to. It’s the word **“seen”**. It may be the word **“noticed”** in some translations. It’s the word that translates to our English word theater. It’s that place we go to get entertained.

David and three of his classmates have been working to put together a play his three friends wrote. They wrote it, produced it, directed it, and performed in it. It was titled Night of the Bizarre with a little Twilight Zone feel. People came to the theater to be entertained.

Jesus couples it with a word in **verse 2** that is translated actor. It’s the word hupocratos from which we get the word hypocrite. A hypocrite is someone who puts on a false appearance. They’re pretenders. Jesus says those who do their acts of righteousness to be seen by others as if in a theater are nothing more than an actor on a stage.

In the days Jesus lived, actors would wear masks so they could play multiple roles. So a hypocrite is someone who wears a mask. They pretend to be someone or something they are not. What they are doing is all for show. Oh, sure, the person they are helping is receiving something, they’re benefitting, but it’s only intended to provide the giver with a photo op. They’re doing it for the camera. They’re doing it to get their name in the paper. They’re doing it for the applause of men.

Augustine wrote **“The love of honor is the deadly bane of true piety. Other vices bring forth evil works, but this brings forth good works in an evil way.”**

That’s an interesting way to look at it. If your motive is to be seen by others, even though what you are doing is good, it’s still done in an evil way. Jesus uses a dramatic example by telling us not to blow a trumpet just before you do something good to draw attention to yourself. Maybe He meant don’t toot your own horn.

In my studies, there isn't a lot of evidence to suggest that people actually blew a trumpet to bring attention to what they were about to do. No documents have been found to indicate that was done, but it could have happened though. I did read one author who noted that in the Temple, there was a box people could put their monetary gifts in that sounded like a trumpet when you dropped in your coins. I've also read that some people wanting to be noticed would actually shake their money pouch to make a sound so that people would turn and notice who was giving. I think Jesus is making a point to show how ridiculous it is to draw attention to oneself if the only reason for giving is to be noticed.

If that's the case, Jesus says you have what you want. The reward is the applause of others.

Greek scholar A.T. Robertson states that this is the "hardest word Jesus has for any class of people and He employs it for these pious pretenders who pose as perfect."

Warren Wiersbe cautions that "If we give with the wrong motive, we rob ourselves of blessing and reward and we rob God of glory, even though the money we share might help a needy person."

H.A. Ironside says "When the applause of men has been sought and obtained, we need not expect further reward when we stand before Christ." He goes on to say that "nothing is more objectionable than advertising charity."

Here's the thing. The applause of men won't last. Yea, it's great in the moment but then it's over. The applause will eventually go silent. When the band stops the music, when the last piece of confetti falls to the ground, when the sound of the oohs and aahs have died down, there is nothing left but the sound of crickets chirping, which also soon ends.

Notice one more thing about these pious hypocrites. They like to do their acts of righteousness in public places, places with the greatest potential for a crowd. They stand on street corners at busy intersections. They give in the synagogues where they will be noticed. I don't think that Jesus means

you can't give in those places. After all, that's the most likely place you will find people who may be looking for some help. I think Jesus is saying that when you give be careful not to be seen by others and that's the point of the next verses.

Jesus gives a warning about the motive behind our public act.

He continues by our giving in a way that is a private act.

## II. MAKE YOUR ACT OF GIVING PRIVATE – vv. 3-4a

The word "but" in **verse 3** introduces a contrast to what was just said in the previous verses. Instead of doing your acts of righteousness to be seen and with self-centered motivation, do them in secret. He illustrates it by telling us not to let our left hand know what our right hand is doing.

I don't know about you, but the last time I checked, both were attached to my body. They tend to work well together. While there are some things you can do one handed, generally speaking two hands working together is optimal.

Try shooting a jump shot in basketball with just one hand.

Try swinging a bat one handed.

Try shooting a bow and arrow one handed.

When I wash or dry dishes, I need two hands.

When I fold laundry, I need two hands.

When I rake leaves, I need two hands.

When I dig a hole with a shovel to plant a tree or set a post, I need two hands.

When I type, two hands work best, although I did know a guy in college who had to type with one hand and he was quite amazing.

You need two hands to play a guitar, a piano, a flute or a trombone. I have seen some play the trumpet with one hand, but two is preferable.

Two hands help us button shirts, tie shoelaces, put on socks.

After my shoulder surgery it was a challenge to get dressed or to put on a belt. Robyn had to cut my meat for me. I felt like a two-year-old.

You get the point. Where possible, our two hands are in lock step together.

**So what in the world does Jesus mean when He tells us when we do our acts of righteousness to do them so the right and left hands don't know that the other is doing?**

Oswald Chambers suggests that it means to give until it is an unconscious habit, that you do it without even thinking. He goes on to say that we should **“develop the habit of having such a relationship to God that you do good without knowing it...the mainspring of your motives will be the Father's heart, not your own; the Father's understanding, not yours. When you are rightly related to God, He will use you as a channel through which His disposition will flow.”**

Again, it comes down to motive. **Am I doing this to bring attention to myself out of pride or am I doing this because I truly want to glorify God in my act of serving in this way through the gift?**

What really matters in our acts of righteousness is pleasing God, making sure what we do is bringing Him glory.

**I Corinthians 10:31 “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God.”**

Take that verse for what it means. Everything we do, even in our acts of righteousness, is to be done for the purpose of glorifying God, of pointing to Him. If possible, as you do your acts of righteousness, do it in a way that is secret.

Tradition says there was a special place in the Temple known as the chamber of silence. It was an out of the way place where shy people who wanted to give anonymously could go to make their donation without anyone else seeing them.

The Apostle Paul tells us that God has ordained or prepared good works for us to do in advance. **Ephesians 2:10 “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”**

God made them. We are to do them and they are waiting for us.

Giving toward some project or some individual.

Giving help to a neighbor who just had surgery or is a single parent.

Giving time to tutor kids after school.

Serving in a local mission as a volunteer.

Teaching a class at church or for a local Bible study.

Opportunities abound to do acts of righteousness.

Again, the question revolves around our motive.

Oswald Chambers puts it in perspective when he writes: **“Briefly summed up: Have no other motive in giving than to please God. The question we should ask ourselves every time the Lord prompts us to do something is this: “what is my motive?”**

**Is it for our glory or God's?**

**Do we want our reward from man, a reward that is fleeting and inadequate or do we want an eternal reward?**

Jesus ends this passage by saying that we should make our act of giving praiseworthy.

### **III.MAKE OUR ACT OF GIVING PRAISEWORTHY – v. 4b**

Again, **I Corinthians 10:31** tells us that everything we do should be to bring glory to God. And when we do it for no other reason to give Him glory through our actions, He will reward us. Our works will pass through judgment to determine if they are done for our benefit or for His. Paul says that all our works will be tried by fire to determine whether they were done for self or God.

#### **I Corinthians 3:10-15**

The reward received by man won't last, but the reward received by God will last forever. Material giving correlates to spiritual blessings and rewards. Notice the reward given to those who did their acts of righteousness in secret with no thought to themselves.

#### **Matthew 25:31-40**

Let me close with a few thoughts about making our act of giving a practice.

#### IV. MAKE OUR ACT OF GIVING A PRACTICE – II Corinthians 9:6-7

Acts of righteousness should be done regularly and systematically. Again, God has prepared good works for us to do. We shouldn't tell God that we just don't feel like it today or we don't want to do all that He is asking of us in that moment.

Acts of righteousness should be done when we have the opportunity and ability.

Acts of righteousness are to be done cheerfully, not begrudgingly, reluctantly, halfheartedly, or unwillingly.

Acts of righteousness should be done according to need. When the believers in Jerusalem heard of the need in Gentile churches, they gave without hesitation. Likewise, Paul collected a gift from the churches in Galatia when a need became known about the church in Jerusalem.

Remember that our motivation isn't to give so we get a reward, but that God might be glorified as you meet the needs of others. Our reward is determined by our motivation.

Ask yourself some questions as you practice your acts of righteousness.

In pride am I really seeking my own glory?

Or, in humility am I seeking to give God the glory?

Are we genuinely generous?