

GIVING - FROM A HIDDEN HEART

Text: Matthew 6:1-4

Key Word: Giving

Key Thought: When I Give, God's Approval Is What Counts.

INTRODUCTION

The words of our text carry with them some challenging words. This greatest of all sermons that Jesus delivered is recorded in Matthew 5, 6 and 7. In it He laid out a way of truly following God's commands without setting artificial limits. And having challenged the notions of what it meant to be truly religious in the areas of angry words, lust, divorce, telling the truth, retaliation and loving our enemies – He now challenges the popular notion of what it meant to be righteous in our giving.

Jesus shows us a better way to give.

I. THREE POSSIBILITIES EXIST TO EXPOSE WHAT IS GOING ON IN OUR HEARTS WHEN WE GIVE

A. Seeking the Praise of People (Matthew 6:1,2)

Jesus said don't do religious things for the sole purpose of being noticed. That's nothing like the heart God desires. In fact, if that's how we give, we will have no reward from our Father in heaven. Because we're proving we haven't let Him take charge of our hearts.

It may appear a bit confusing when we compare other words that Jesus also said,

"Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

Matthew 5:16

Now He's saying be careful so that people don't see. Isn't that a big contradiction? Not if we understand Jesus' intention. These two statements are actually making the same point. In Matthew 5:16 when people see our good deeds they are to praise our Father, not us.

In Matthew 6:1, Jesus says don't do your acts of righteousness just so others will notice **YOU**. That won't bring any glory to the Father if you are wanting all the praise yourself. **Good deeds are to make God visible, not shine the spotlight on us. That's His point.** So, He again points to the Pharisees. They were the religious legalists of His day. They knew what the Old Testament law said . . .

I. THREE POSSIBILITIES EXIST TO EXPOSE WHAT IS GOING ON IN OUR HEARTS WHEN WE GIVE (Contd.)

A. Seeking the Praise of People (Matthew 6:1,2) (Contd.)

“There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore, I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.”

Deuteronomy 15:11

The Pharisees knew this law, but when obeying it, they turned it into a show. They couldn't seem to wait for an opportunity to be recognized by the crowds. That's why Jesus said . .

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men.”

Matthew 6:2

A humble uncomplicated walk with God had been replaced by a **prime-time performance of religion**. Righteousness was placed on display. This had evolved into a “**strut your stuff spirituality**.” It had become “**piety on parade**.” Lights, camera, action! The trumpet blast was a signal to inform the people that it was time to give to the poor. The Pharisees quickly drew a crowd as they flamboyantly made their way through the streets to the synagogue to “share” their gifts with the impoverished. What a sight that must have been!

“they loved praise from men more than praise from God”

John 12:43

“Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and they wear extra long tassels on their robes.

6. And how they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the most prominent seats in the synagogue!

7. They enjoy the attention they get on the streets, and they enjoy being called ‘rabbi.’”

Matthew 23:5-7 (NLT)

I. THREE POSSIBILITIES EXIST TO EXPOSE WHAT IS GOING ON IN OUR HEARTS WHEN WE GIVE (Contd.)

A. Seeking the Praise of People (Matthew 6:1,2) (Contd.)

Their religious acts, including giving to the poor, were all a big show. Jesus uses a rather strong word to describe them. He calls them **hypocrites**. In classical Greek, a hypocrite was an orator or an actor. It described a person who layed aside his or her true identity and assumed a false one. **No longer themselves, but in disguise, they impersonated someone else.**

There is no harm in this in the theatre. Everyone knows the people on the stage are playing a part. There is an understanding with the audience. People know they are watching a performance – a person pretending to be someone else. In the Palestine of Jesus' day, there were a number of fine theatres. He was utilizing a vivid image to capture the attention of his hearers. **The trouble with religious hypocrites is that they deliberately set out to deceive people.** They put on a theatrical display before an audience.

All this is done for one purpose – applause. And the people who acted in this manner had already received their reward in full. We may not employ a troop of trumpeters, but we can still toot our own horns. We must be cautious not to draw attention to our giving in order to be praised by men. **Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5: 1-11) are vivid examples of this hidden danger.** We need more names on mops than on plaques. Are you giving from a hidden heart?

B. Preserving Anonymity Yet Quietly Congratulating Ourselves (Matthew 6:3)

Not only are we to avoid giving for the praise of others, we are also to make sure we don't give simply so we can privately praise ourselves. It is possible to take deliberate steps to keep our giving a secret while all the while gloating over our self-satisfied generosity.

“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”

Matthew 6:3

Giving is a real activity involving real people in real need. Its purpose is to alleviate the distress of the needy. Yet it is possible to turn an act of mercy into an act of vanity – so that our principal motive in giving is not the benefit of the person receiving the gift, but for the benefit of congratulating ourselves.

In a proper sense, our giving is to be a secret even from ourselves. We're not to let our left hand know what the right is doing. **It is possible for our left hand to feel inclined to congratulate the right hand, going over to pat it in gesture of praise.**

I. THREE POSSIBILITIES EXIST TO EXPOSE WHAT IS GOING ON IN OUR HEARTS WHEN WE GIVE (Contd.)

B. Preserving Anonymity Yet Quietly Congratulating Ourselves (Matthew 6:3)

“Right hand, look what you gave! None of your friends are giving that generously. You know, God’s pretty lucky to have someone like you so generous on His team. He can get a lot more work done now.”

*** In September of 1994 the Associated Press reported on a demonstration that farmers staged in New Delhi. They were protesting India’s plans to import three million tons of Dutch dung to be used for farm fertilizer. Why? Asked the Indian farmers. There is no shortage of cows in India. And dung from Indian cows would not be tainted by pesticides.

So in protest, about one hundred farmers rolled six ox carts piled high with top-quality, home grown Indian cow dung right up to Parliament. Presumably this got the legislators attention.

The message? Our dung is better than their dung. ***

That’s a claim that slightly resembles the pride of a self-congratulatory giver. I’m better. I’m just more generous than they are. A pretty arrogant claim, wouldn’t you think? That’s why Jesus wants us to give and be done with it. Christian giving is marked by self-sacrifice and self-forgetfulness, not by self-congratulation. After we give, we should pretty much put it out of our minds lest we enter a dangerous trap.

C. Desiring God’s Approval Alone (Matthew 6:4)

Jesus wants us to know that we’re not like actors playing a part. **True followers of Christ live out their lives authentically before an audience of ONE.** All that should really matter to us is what God thinks. We need to be concerned about pleasing Him.

Now, some might take this instruction so strictly that they won’t write a cheque to the church. They reason, well the treasurer will see my name and how much I gave, and the gift won’t be a secret. **Remember that Jesus is talking about our motives for giving and what is going on in the heart while giving. He’s not issuing some new and complicated legalism. A person with the right heart is still giving in secret regardless of who may happen to see.**

A person with the kind of heart Jesus is describing is so tuned into God that they probably even forget that someone will be looking at their cheque or there etransfer. They don’t care. Because they gave out of a generous heart of love, not with any thought whatsoever about who might see and know. That just doesn’t matter to them. God’s approval is what counts.

I. THREE POSSIBILITIES EXIST TO EXPOSE WHAT IS GOING ON IN OUR HEARTS WHEN WE GIVE (Contd.)

C. Desiring God's Approval Alone (Matthew 6:4) (Contd.)

They're not actors on a stage. They are real. They live for an audience of ONE.

****** A writer named Clara Null says, "For years we lived in a small town with one bank and three churches. Early one Monday morning, the bank called all three churches with the same request: *"Could you bring in Sunday's collection right away? We're out of \$1 bills."* ******

"Humor for Preaching and Teaching"
p. 75

This a good reminder that secrecy is not to be an excuse for selfishness. Consider King David in the Old Testament. David, when the temple was being built, stood up in front of the people as a leader and set an example by announcing he would make a sacrificial gift to help the temple get built. **His motive was not to be applauded, but as a leader to set the standard in sacrificial giving.**

The Koran says that if a person prays, then prayer will take him halfway to paradise. If he fasts, that will get him to the gates of paradise. But if a person gives to the poor, the gates of paradise will open for him and he will be admitted. But that's not what the Bible tells us. Christians should pray, fast and help those in need, but those acts won't bring salvation. Salvation is a free gift that God gives people who will accept what Jesus did for them on the cross.

The reward from God is an eternal one given to people whose hearts have been changed by Jesus so that they live entirely for Him. They are not seeking a reward through giving. **They have changed lives and await the crown of righteousness laid up in heaven for them because of Jesus and His victory.**

II. HOW CAN I TELL IF MY MOTIVES ARE RIGHT?

How can I be sure I'm giving with the right kind of heart? We have some pointers from these words of Jesus. If my motives are right . . .

A. I Will Give Spontaneously Balanced with God's Wisdom

"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?"

1 John 3:17

When I hear of a sincere need, my heart should be prompted to give.

"There were no needy persons among them."

Acts 4:34

B. I Will Give Secretly and Enjoy the Moment

This means I will find some way to do something anonymously for someone. Secret giving is fun. Is there someone you could surprise?

C. I Will Give with NO Thought of Reward - Giving to a need is an issue of love. I should NOT give because I'm thinking God will love me more OR that I will secure a place in heaven OR I believe I will gain the recognition of someone on earth.

Revised from "Secret Giving" by Matthew Rogers on June 10, 2001

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Date: May 18/25

Place: FCA

Time: 10:30 Am

Song: Take My Life (Take my Heart and Form It) - D; Take Me as I Am - D

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Jesus Shows Us a Better Way to Give.

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B. Preserving Anonymity Yet Quietly Congratulating Ourselves (Matthew 6:3)

C. Desiring God's Approval Alone (Matthew 6:4)

II. HOW CAN I TELL IF MY MOTIVES ARE RIGHT?

A. I Will Give Spontaneously - *1 John 3:17; Acts 4:34*

B. I Will Give Secretly

C. I Will Give with NO Thought of Reward