

Matthew 6:1-18

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Date: 16 September 2018

Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0 : 00] Please take out your copy of God's Word and join me in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 6. Unless the Lord decides to take me home now, we're actually going to preach the beginning of Matthew chapter 6.

! This is a good day. In today's text, Matthew records Jesus dismantling the hypocrisy of His day. Hypocrisy is the act of claiming some moral standard or beliefs and then living in contradiction to your claims.

Hypocrisy was not new in Jesus' day. It has existed since the fall of man. In Genesis chapter 4, we can observe the very first hypocrite, Cain, who offered insincere worship to God.

And when his hypocrisy was exposed, his true character was revealed in the murder of his brother. In 2 Samuel chapter 15, Absalom hypocritically vowed allegiance to his father, King David, while all along plotting to overthrow him.

[1 : 12] The prophets spoke against the hypocrisy of the nation of Israel. In Isaiah chapter 1, God is grieved over Israel because their religious devotion is not consistent with their actions.

And in Amos chapter 5, verse 21 through 24, God deals strongly with the hypocrisy of Israel. Listen to what he says.

Take away from me the noise of your songs.

To the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

You see the disconnect in the people of Israel's worship in that day and their obedience to God. There was such similar hypocrisy in Jesus' day.

[2 : 29] Listen to the very scathing words that Jesus speaks to the scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew chapter 23, verse 27 and 28. Jesus says, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.

So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. In fact, much of the Sermon on the Mount, where our text for today is found, is concerned with correcting the gross misunderstanding of the law and subsequent hypocrisy in which Jesus lived.

Recall that one of the major themes of Jesus' sermon is whole person righteousness. He says astounding things in this sermon in chapter 5 we've looked at so far, like in verse 20.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. And the people in his day would have been absolutely astonished by this.

[3 : 55] If the scribes and Pharisees aren't keeping the law well enough, then who possibly can? And in verse 48 of chapter 5, Jesus said, You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

You must be holy as God is holy. And you have to try to imagine Jesus' listeners going, What? How is this possible? How can we be found more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees? How can we be found perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect?

And so we, with a bigger understanding of the good news of Jesus Christ, know that we are not and cannot be perfect under our own volition.

But that we can have a righteousness that comes from outside of us. The perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. If we are found in Christ, we pursue perfection, being found by God to be perfect.

[5 : 13] We are declared righteous in Christ. We are positionally moved from unrighteous to righteous, from sinner to saint.

And because of that new identity, we now pursue this perfection by the power that God provides. The now and not yet of the Christian life is a matter for very careful consideration.

Because hypocrisy was not left behind with the false practitioners of Jesus' day. There were hypocrites in the early church.

There were hypocrites in the medieval church. There were hypocrites in the Reformation church. And there are hypocrites in today's church. Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 4, verse 1 and 2, that there will be hypocrisy to the end of the age.

Hypocrisy can be practiced by those who are not in the faith, but act as though they are, believing that, showing up, doing certain things, saying certain things, posting certain things, that they will be found right with God.

[6 : 36] Hypocrisy can also be practiced by those who are in the faith, but act as though they are not. So all of us, every one of us, needs to be warned today as we take a look at what Jesus has to say about the hypocrisy of His day and ours.

So our text for this morning is Matthew 6, verses 1-18. Before I read it, beloved, let me remind you that this is God's Word to us. It was written for His glory and our good, so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Begin reading in verse 1. Jesus says, 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.

[7 : 59] And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. Do 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. Pray then like this, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

[9 : 01] And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces, that their fasting may be seen by others.

Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others, but by your Father who is in secret.

And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Now, we don't normally deal with this much text at one time.

There's a lot here. And there is much to be unpacked in some coming weeks. But I want you to see this morning that the primary exhortation of this entire text is found in verse 1.

[10 : 08] The driving thing, the ultimate thing that Jesus is trying to communicate here is this idea of not practicing your righteousness to be seen by people, to be praised by people, because if you do, then you will have no reward in heaven.

And he calls this activity hypocrisy. Jesus issues a caution that if the point of our good works is to be praised by men, if we are motivated by what others think of us rather than what God thinks of us, then we do not receive heavenly reward for our good works.

There is such danger here as hypocrisy can be so deceptive. Augustine once wrote, the love of honor is the deadly bane of true piety or holiness.

The vices bring forth evil works, but this, this love of honor, brings forth good works in an evil way.

So we can be doing all the right things, even in our own estimation, doing them rightly. People can be praising us for all of our outward appearance of holiness, but we can be altogether displeasing to God in the way we do the things that we do.

[11:44] Do you notice that in verse 1 that Jesus is tying obedience toward God with reward? He's placing the two things together side by side.

He's partnering them up. I am so grateful to serve a God that is ever seeking His own glory and is ever working for my good.

Duty and delight are not mutually exclusive, but are intrinsic for a life well lived. We as people just seem so apt to want to cast off all authority, any instruction whatsoever.

We want to be autonomous in all ways. And this is never good for people. It's good for us to live under the loving instruction of our God.

These two things come together, duty and delight. You want to be filled with joy? Set yourself to obedience to God. The 17 verses that follow, verse 1, are illustrations of what Jesus is trying to teach His listeners.

[13:07] And with the exception of verses 9-15, which we know is the teaching on the Lord's Prayer, and we're going to deal with that at length in some coming weeks, these illustrations follow a carefully crafted pattern as follows.

And I want you to see this, and I know that I'm saying it and I'm looking at it. It's much easier to look at it than to hear it. So I'm going to repeat it a number of times. But it follows a six-point pattern.

Okay? So just listen. Don't try to write all this down. In each of the three illustrations, Jesus brilliantly uses the same pattern. First, the observance.

Second, the prohibition. Third, the intent. Fourth, the reward. Fifth, the better observant.

And sixth, the better reward. And each of them neatly walk through this pattern of presentation.

We'll see very particularly momentarily how this happens.

[14:18] But before we do that, I want us to consider why Jesus uses the three illustrations of giving to the needy or almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.

Why do you think He uses these three? Do you think that these three activities are particularly susceptible to hypocrisy?

Or that these three activities are of particular value in our pursuit of righteousness? I don't think that either is true.

All three of these things we'll see are things that we should be doing as Christian people, as disciples of Jesus Christ. But I don't think they're particular for that reason, for our instruction, as these are more important than others.

But these were the most important acts of personal piety for the falsely religious of Jesus' day.

[15:20] They elevated these three in personal piety. So the scribes and the Pharisees would have talked lots about almsgivings and prayer and fasting. You want to be viewed as personally pious?

These are the things that you will pick up. So Jesus is not so much building for us what true religion looks like, merely these three practices, but He's dismantling the hypocrisy of His day.

He's very poignantly speaking the hypocrisy of His day. So, we may find that we are given to hypocrisy in these activities.

It's so very possible to do the very thing that people in Jesus' day were doing, but we should not limit the teaching here to these activities. What else might you do to seek the approval of others? What might you do because you want others to think that you are particularly holy? I could list a slew of things that could fit in this category.

[16:32] How are your actions and intentions inconsistent with your stated moral standards or beliefs? And I pray for this for us this morning.

Well, it's been my prayer for us across the last couple of weeks to this morning so that we would all find ourselves carefully examining our lives in the coming moments and beyond that God would reveal any hypocrisy in us so that we would be brought to repentance.

So again, the exhortation for us this morning from the words of Jesus. 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.

So let's look at them and we'll look at them in three points following each of the examples. Number one, do not give like the hypocrites but rather look to heavenly reward.

Let me see this in verses 2, 3, and 4. Do not give like the hypocrites but rather look to heavenly reward. Notice first, verse 2, the observance.

[17 : 53] Thus, when you give to the needy, thus, in your alms giving, this is practice that was going on in their day.

Jesus does not do away with the practice. We are also meant to give to the needy in our day but in a particular way. In Jesus' day, the giving of alms had been taken to extreme measures in Second Temple Judaism.

In rabbinical teaching, we can read things like this. I quote, It is better to give to charity than to lay up gold. I think we're on board so far.

However, for charity will save a man from death. It will expiate sin or atone for sin.

So, works. Second Temple Judaism, the Pharisees were teaching that giving would cancel out sin.

Does that heresy sound familiar?

[18 : 57] As a result, many in Jesus' time thought that the rich were much more likely to make it to heaven. And they would make a big deal, a big fanfare out of this giving.

This is why Jesus' statement in Matthew 19, verse 24, was so shocking to the disciples. He said there, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.

That's the context behind that statement. And do you recall the response of the disciples in verse 25? They were greatly astonished, Matthew says, and they asked, who then can be saved?

If the rich can't do enough almsgiving, then who can? And Jesus is destroying this type of thinking, this earning favor before God, thinking apart from the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So, that is the observance. That's what they're doing in this day. And second, we see the prohibition. Jesus says, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets.

[20 : 24] It would seem that they held parades when they were coming to the temple to give their money. People would look at them and praise them for their good doing. And Jesus tells us, thirdly, what their intent is.

That they may be praised by others. That they would be seeking the approval of others. The building up of others. That they would please praise men.

And what is the reward for this? Fourth, Jesus says, truly I say to you, they have received their reward. And what is that reward?

The praise of men. what a paltry reward. What an insignificant reward. And it's such a shame in our culture that what we seem to worship most is celebrity.

Not intelligence. Not good doing. There are people who are famous for being famous in our culture. this is an astonishing thing.

[21 : 33] All of the acclaim. All of the praise. You have people on shows, talent shows, weeping. This is the dream of my life.

That what? That for a moment people would praise me. That I would be the next America's whatever. insignificant reward.

Paltry compared to the reward of heaven. Who cares if people like us if we're not pleasing God? So this is a declaration of judgment.

Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. And we'll see some repetition of that very phrase. Look then though at the beginning of verse 3 at the better observance.

Jesus says, but when you give to the needy. So give, and we talked some weeks ago about giving and the necessity of giving, so we're not going to spend a lot of time on that very topic.

[22 : 40] But we are meant to give. We are meant to recognize that all good things come from God. When you begin to realize that the blessings that God has given you are meant for you to turn around and bless others and that that is good for you, that that duty is married with delight, this will be a turning point in your life in America.

When you actually begin to wrap your brain around this fact that God doesn't give you things just for you, but for others which is for your good. That you might gain more of Him in the process.

So when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. And clearly this is an exaggeration. This is not a possible act to do.

Jesus is trying to help us understand that this should so be done in a way that we're not being praised by men. See if you can get the left hand of your body to not know what's happening with the right hand of your body.

Jesus is saying do it in that way. Do it in a way that is fully fixed on pleasing the Lord and not men. So that your giving may be in secret.

[23 : 57] And then there's this better reward. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. This is the reward we want. This is what we're seeking after.

as followers of Jesus Christ. If that is an astounding thing to you, but why? Why would I seek the reward of heaven and not the reward of earth?

Then you have not tasted and seen the goodness of God. If you've beheld God in his glory, this should ignite you.

You should come to life at the thought of heavenly reward. At putting off reward for now, for reward for later, ought to make you go, yes. I don't want to be found as these people.

I don't want Jesus to say of me, of my life, truly I say to you, you've already received your reward. I want to lay it up for later because it is better later.

[25 : 01] He gives us another example, another illustration. So secondly, do not pray like the hypocrites, but rather look to heavenly reward.

Verses 5 and 8. And there's a repetition in the pattern here. So he gives a couple of instructions, but you see the pattern once again, these six points.

Beginning of verse 5 and the beginning of verse 7. And when you pray. So certainly not teaching us not to pray, but he's teaching us to pray in a very particular way.

So first we see this observance and when you pray. And then we see the prohibition. How are we to not pray then? We must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners.

They love to go out in the public places seeking the praise of men. This is what they're hoping for. Look at how holy I am.

[26 : 10] And we're also not to heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do. As those outside the family of God, we're not to heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles.

And you can see the intent then, thirdly, that they may be seen by others, and the Gentiles think that they will be heard for their many words.

And the reward again, truly I say to you, they have received their reward. But then Jesus, once again, gives us a better observance.

A better observance. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.

We have been, by the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ, who intercedes for us, drawn into a relationship with God. Here Jesus calls him our Father.

[27 : 21] What a glorious thing this is. At the almighty of heaven and earth, the one who spoke all things into existence, will have a conversation with us.

This should be massively humbling. And once again, if it doesn't seem massive to you, that you could go into your room and shut the door and spend time with God in prayer, then you've not tasted and seen the goodness of God.

You have not understood the vastness of his power and his might. You have a small view of God. He's not just the guy that you go hang out with. He's the God of the universe and yet he's called our Father. I love, and we'll talk about next week, Lord willing, the opening of the Lord's prayer is our Father in Heaven.

Wraps all that up together. Our Father in Heaven. And I have learned things about God's loving kindness towards me as a father in becoming a father.

[28 : 36] And I can't help but be moved when my kids want to come and talk with me in the way that they climb up on my lap and they sit. And as an imperfect father, a very imperfect father, my attention is riveted on them.

God does this with us. So we can go into our room and we can shut the door and we can pray to our Father who is in secret.

Does this mean that we cannot pray publicly? No. It does not mean that. Many have made that mean that. It does not mean that. It just means that we should be careful about the intent of our public prayers.

It's good for us when we gather together. I would even suggest necessary for us as we gather together that we pray together. But as someone comes to lead us in public prayer, we should be so careful about the intent.

Am I leading us in prayer because I want us to be pleasing to God as we pray together or because I am concerned about what you'll think of me in my praying? We see public prayer happening in the Scripture.

[29 : 48] I just want to give you one example. Acts 1 verse 14. The disciples are waiting. Jesus has said, wait for me. Wait for my power to come. And what do we find them doing in an upper room?

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers. They were together and they were praying together.

People were praying out loud together in this place and we should do the same. But we should be very careful the intent of what we do when we pray publicly.

We also see in this better observance Jesus simply says, do not be like them. And who is he referring to? He's referring to these Gentiles, right, that heap up empty phrases, thinking that they'll be heard for their many words.

And does this mean that we cannot pray long? prayers? Many will take the Lord's prayer and recite it. And I'm okay with the recitation of the Lord's prayer.

[30 : 51] I don't think that's particularly sinful. However, Jesus doesn't say pray this. He says pray then like this. This is a model for your praying.

But some will advocate the recitation of this because it's brief. We should keep things brief because he says don't be like the Gentiles. Heap up many words.

So is that what it means? No. But we should not pray long prayers because we think that lengthy prayers are a mark of holiness.

Even when I'm by myself, right, in that time of closed-door secret prayer, I should not think of myself, wow, can I pray? Look at the words I can spill out before God.

And certainly in our public praying together, we shouldn't heap up words and words and words upon words because people will think we're so holy for how much we have to say.

[31 : 50] How can I make this claim to counterpoint what some would say here? Jesus prayed long prayers. Luke 6, verse 12, Luke says, in these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.

It would be very silly to think that he recited the Lord's Prayer over and over and over again. Many words poured out to God in those times of prayer with him.

And then Jesus says there will be a better reward. A better reward. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

So we're looking to the heavenly reward to the eternal reward. And Jesus also says, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

So it means reward for now as well. His presence and his power in our lives. And the third illustration. It says, do not fast like the hypocrites, but rather look to heavenly reward.

[33 : 01] Do not fast like the hypocrites. And I think we will spend some time on fasting in some coming weeks. But briefly look again the observance. And when you fast.

Again in verse 17, but when you fast. I think this is a practice that many in this room have never done and probably misunderstand.

But the assumption here is that we will. As we'll be part of our following of Jesus Christ will be times of fasting in our lives. But he issues a prohibition.

Do not look gloomy like the hypocrites for they disfigure their faces. They would literally put on makeup to look pitiful. And what he's saying to us here is that you're not doing this to be seen by others.

I've had people who are fasting tell me they're fasting and then tell me they probably shouldn't have told me that they were fasting. He's also not prohibiting that. Like, oh, I shouldn't have said that.

Like, my fasting is supposed to be so secretive that no one can possibly know that I'm fasting.

[34 : 07] No, he's getting that intent. Why are you doing the thing that you're doing? Right? Is it for the praise of others or is it to please God? So we're prohibited here by Jesus to not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces and the intent that their fasting may be seen by others.

And once again, this repetition, their reward, truly I say to you, they have received their reward. But then he gives to us the better observance, but when you fast, anoint your head, wash your face,

make yourself look nice, presentable to those around you, that your fasting may not be seen by others, but by your father who is in secret.

And then the better reward. And your father who sees in secret will reward you. So you see how all of these, these 17 verses are aiming us back at verse 1.

And this strong warning, this 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.

So we ought not give or pray or fast or do anything hypocritically, seeking the praise of man, but should rather do everything to please God and the reward that is given by him and found in him.

[35 : 45] I hope that you will join me in continued self-examination in our devotion to God for our good and his glory as we work in this text more in the following weeks.

As we look more at what is the right way to go about praying, I think we'll spend two or three weeks there and how ought we also fast.

Let me close this morning with a quotation from Thomas Brooks who was a 17th century Puritan preacher. It was on your bulletin the last two weeks, but I just didn't feel like I could put it on there one more time.

So if you happen to have an old bulletin you could read along. If not, listen carefully. He wrote this, which I love. Remember this, that your life is short, your duties many, your assistance great, and your reward sure.

Therefore, faint not, hold on and hold up in ways of well-doing, and heaven shall make amends for all. Let's pray together.

[36 : 53] Thank you.