Sermon on the Mount: Righteous Living – Motives Matter – November 8, 2026

Motive matters – Why you do something matters as much as what you do

Have you ever watched someone do something incredibly generous, only to discover later that their generosity wasn't really about helping someone else?

- Perhaps they gave large donation, but only because they wanted their name displayed
- Perhaps they volunteered their time, but only because they wanted recognition
- Perhaps they helped someone, but made sure everyone knew about it

The action looked good on the outside, but the motive behind it told a different story

In the Roman world recognition was everything

Public honor, social status, the approval of others were powerful motivators in everyday life

- Social Status – Political Recognition – Religious Recognition – Public Honor = Currency

In Rome, when a military general returned home victorious from battle…Roman Triumph

- **The victorious general:** The conquering commander rode in a magnificent chariot
- **The captured treasures:** Gold, silver, weapons, and other spoils of war were displayed
- **The prisoners:** Captured enemy soldiers and defeated kings were paraded the streets
- **The Roman soldiers:** Victorious troops marched behind their commander
- **The cheering crowds:** Thousands of Roman citizens gathered to watch

Public honor, reputation, status, and prestige were extremely important

In the Roman world, people lived for and had a deep seated desire for public recognition

Jesus addresses that same desire in Matthew 6:1–4

Jesus says not to practice righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them

6 "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. **2** "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.**3** But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Have you ever done something good and secretly hoped somebody would notice?

Men…we do this all the time. We do some chore and then watch in our wife will praise

You didn't ask for recognition, but when nobody acknowledged what you did…disappointed

- There is something inside all of us that enjoys being noticed
- We appreciate a thank-you, a compliment, or a pat on the back
- We like knowing people see what we do and appreciate our efforts – Jesus refuting

Big Idea: Seek God's reward rather than man's recognition

Here's the danger: When our desire to be noticed becomes greater than our desire to honor God, even good things can be done for the wrong reasons

Exactly what Jesus addresses in Matt. 6:1–4…giving to the needy = Good | Wrong Motive

Jesus shifts talking about character of His people to examining motives behind their actions

- Jesus warns His followers against practicing righteousness to be seen by others
- Our greatest concern should never be receiving applause people; approval from God

It is possible to do the right things for the wrong reasons

We can give generously, serve faithfully, appear spiritually mature while secretly seeking the attention and approval of others

It isn't wrong to do a good job…it isn't wrong to want to be appreciated for doing a good job

But the question remains: Why are you doing a good thing?

- Is it b/c you are a Christian and giving your best represents Christ and that's enough
- Or is it because you want people to be impressed by you. Give 3 ways to keep heart

1. **Measure your motivation (1)**

6 "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.

Examine your motives because God cares not only about what you do but why you do it.

One of the easiest things to do in life is become more concerned with how something looks than with what is actually happening on the inside

- People work hard to maintain a good reputation…build an impressive image…look good

Unfortunately, that same attitude can find its way into our spiritual lives

- We can become more concerned with looking spiritual than actually being spiritual
- We can become more interested in appearing righteous than pursuing righteousness
- We can even turn our service to God into an opportunity to draw attention to ourselves

Jesus teaches us righteous actions lose their reward when recognition becomes motivation

a. Recognize the Warning - Jesus begins with a strong command: "Beware."

Word - Idea of being on guard, watching carefully, paying attention to a potential danger

- Warning His disciples about something that can quietly creep into their spiritual lives
  - The danger is not necessarily doing something wrong
  - The danger is doing something right for the wrong reason

Beware of practicing your righteousness

- He is referring to outward expressions of religious devotion and righteous living
- He specifically addresses giving (vv. 2–4), praying (vv. 5–15), and fasting (vv. 16–18)

Jesus not condemning the activities…He was exposing the wrong motivation behind them

b. Reject the Wrong Motivation - "in order to be seen by them."

- The issue is not simply that other people happen to see our good works

Matthew 5:16 - "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." How do we reconcile these two passages

- In Matthew 5:16, the goal is for people to see our good works and glorify God
- In Matthew 6:1, the goal is for people to see our good works and glorify us

The difference is motivation…your glory or God's glory

Jesus is confronting the desire to turn spiritual activities into personal recognition

- The Pharisees had developed a reputation for outward religious devotion
  - Public Long Fasts – Making a Spectacle out of Giving - Long Winded Prayers

They were concerned with how they appeared before others, but Jesus was concerned with what was happening in their hearts

Wanted people to notice their righteousness more than wanted God receive their worship

c. Remember the Greater Audience – We live for an audience of One

Jesus reminds us our lives are lived before an audience greater than people around us

- He refers to God as "your Father who is in heaven."
  - This is important because the Father sees what other people cannot see

People can observe your actions, but God knows your intentions

People can hear your words, but God knows your heart

The question is not simply whether people are impressed with what you do, but whether God is pleased with why you do it

Junior High Ministry – Disney Trip – Praying – Anonymous $1000

Three Ways to Measure Your Motivation

⇒ **Examine Why You Serve** – Serving because I love Christ or I want the appreciation

⇒ **Evaluate Who You Seek to Impress** – More concerned about people than God

⇒ **Establish Whose Approval Matters Most** – If nobody noticed would I still do them

2. Abandon worldly acclaim (2-4a)

[2] "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.[3] But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] so that your giving may be in secret.

Jewish = giving to poor was considered expression of righteousness & religious devotion

- It was one of the most respected acts of Jewish piety, along with prayer and fasting
- Giving Was a Religious Responsibility (Deut. 15) – Poor, Orphans, Widows, Needy
- Giving Could Become a Public Display – Wealthy individuals set up in prominent places
- Jesus Confronted Wrong Motives – Not giving itself…but the desire for recognition

In religious culture of Jesus' day, generosity could become a means of gaining a reputation rather than demonstrating genuine devotion to God

a. Recognize the Temptation of Public Praise

"Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you

- Notice that Jesus says, "when you give," not "if you give." – Expected Normal Christian
- His reference to sounding a trumpet is a vivid picture of drawing attention to oneself
  - This was an actual practice…wealthy Jews would blow a trumpet…draw attention

as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others.

Jesus "hypocrites" to describe those who give publicly for the purpose of receiving praise

The word originally referred to an actor who performed a role on a stage

- These individuals were essentially acting out a part
- Wanted others to believe were deeply devoted to God…motivated human approval

b. Realize the emptiness of human applause - Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward

- **This is a powerful statement –** You will not receive heavenly rewards…already earth
- The word translated "received" carries the idea of receiving something in full
- In other words, they got exactly what they were looking for
  - They wanted applause, and they received applause
  - They wanted recognition, and they received recognition
  - They wanted people to think highly of them, and people thought highly of them

But that's all they will receive – Their reward will be temporary not eternal

Church – Giving Campaign – Orange Envelopes 5k – Purple Envelopes 10k – Stage – Clap

Human recognition may make us feel important for a moment…cannot produce eternal reward

c. Redirect your motivation toward God's glory

[3] But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] so that your giving may be in secret. - Notice the difference between verse 2 and verse 3

Hypocrites want others to see generosity - Believers are content generosity remain unseen

- Jesus uses an exaggerated picture of two hands acting independently
- Right hand gives to someone in need…left hand supposedly remains unaware of the gift

Obviously, your hands cannot literally keep secrets from one another

Hyperbole to communicate the importance of giving without drawing attention to yourself

Every year our missions trip gets paid for every year I don't know where the money comes from

We should develop a desire to please God even when nobody else is watching

⇒ Give when nobody knows
⇒ Serve when nobody applauds
⇒ Help when nobody recognizes
⇒ Remain faithful when nobody appreciates

Don't allow the absence of human recognition to discourage your obedience

Our greatest reward is knowing our heavenly father sees our faithfulness

3. Find God's favor (4b) And your Father who sees in secret will reward you

Jesus most important audience in our lives is not standing in front of us…seated in heaven

People may never see the sacrifices you make, the generosity you demonstrate, or the quiet acts of obedience you perform. But God sees every one of them

Even when people don't see your faithfulness, your Father does

a. Recognize the Father's Awareness - And your Father who sees in secret

- Jesus emphasizes that God sees what other people cannot see
- Jesus contrasts the applause of people with the awareness of God
  - Notice that Jesus doesn't simply say that God sees what happens in public
  - He says God sees what happens in secret

This means there is no such thing as an unnoticed act of faithfulness in the eyes of God

- God sees the generosity nobody applauds
- God sees the sacrifice nobody acknowledges
- God sees the service nobody appreciates
- God sees the obedience nobody recognizes

Think about a mother who spends countless hours caring for her children

- Much of what she does goes unnoticed – Meal – Mess – Stays awake sick child

But the fact that nobody sees her work doesn't make it insignificant

In the same way, much of our faithfulness to God happens where nobody else is watching

People may overlook your faithfulness, but God never does

b. Remember the Father's Reward - And your Father who sees in secret will reward you

- How great is it that Jesus ends with a promise…follow this command = Rewarded
- The Father who sees in secret will reward His children – What is the reward?
  - **The reward is God's approval -** When people don't see your generosity, God does
    - Do you know how much it means when someone says they're proud of you…God
    - This reward is worth far more than anything human recognition can provide

The word reminds us that God does not overlook the faithful obedience of His people

Consider the contrast between getting your reward on earth vs heaven:

- Human recognition fades; God's recognition matters eternally
- Human applause is temporary; God's reward is lasting
- Human praise satisfies for a moment; God's approval is worth living for

In Matthew 25:21, Jesus tells of a master who commends his faithful servant:

"Well done, good and faithful servant." – The masters approval…this is what we seek

- Imagine reaching the end of your earthly life and hearing those words from the Lord

All the sacrifices nobody noticed, all the service nobody acknowledged, and all the quiet obedience nobody celebrated will have been worth it.

Live today with eternity in mind

- Don't exchange eternal rewards for temporary recognition.
- Don't sacrifice faithfulness to gain popularity
- Don't become discouraged when your service goes unnoticed

One day, the approval of your heavenly Father will matter infinitely more than the recognition of man

Big Idea: Seek God's reward rather than man's recognition