

Following The Way Of The Kingdom: Studies in the Sermon on the Mount

**First Methodist Church of Tulsa
Fall 2025 | Rev. Dr. Matthew Johnson**

*Session 5: Piety (Matthew 6:1-18)
October 8, 2025*

MATTHEW 6:1

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.

1. What is piety? How would you describe your own life of piety? What are the acts that you do in order to become the kind of person who is pious?

2. Is there any hesitation about thinking of your acts of piety in terms of God's attention toward you? In other words, does it feel weird to think about doing them with God watching? Is there a difference between being aware of God's attention and doing something in order to get God's attention?

3. Have you been aware, or are you aware, of any places in your life in which you might be guilty of hypocrisy (playing Christian without a transformed heart)? What do you think the path out of that is?

Following The Way Of The Kingdom: Studies in the Sermon on the Mount

First Methodist Church of Tulsa
Fall 2025 | Rev. Dr. Matthew Johnson

Session 5: Piety (Matthew 6:1-18)
October 8, 2025

MATTHEW 6:1

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.

- I. Willard question 3, again. – what is righteousness?
 - a. Last week we looked at righteousness as covenant faithfulness, i.e. the Law.
 - b. This week's passage has us looking at piety. **How would you describe piety?**
 - i. OED – related to *pity* or showing mercy. Compassion.
 - ii. Reverence and obedience to God; devotion to religious duties and observances; godliness, devoutness.
 - iii. Pious – Of an action, thought, resolve, etc.: characterized by, expressing, or resulting from true reverence and obedience to God; devout, religious.
 - c. The reason I bring this up is because being faithful to covenant looks like devotion and reverence, doesn't it?
 - i. How do we show honor and devotion to God? By doing certain actions.
 - ii. This relates to this passage because it is about devotion, reverence, and compassion through alms-giving, prayer, and fasting.
 - iii. Would you say a person who gives to the poor, prays, and fasts is pious? Why would a person do these things? (Because they're devoted to God).

- d. The big question for us tonight, though, is there a way to pervert piety? Yes, there is. And how can one do that? **It's a matter of the heart.** What is the state and posture of the heart?
 - e. It's the same problem we ran into last week with regard to obeying the law. The heart is always the problem which is why we need God to give us a new one.
 - f. **Matt. 6:1** "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."
 - i. "Practicing your righteousness" is piety.
 - ii. The warning here isn't to do pious acts or to practice piety, the warning is about the posture of the heart.
 - iii. "in order to be seen by them."
 - 1. Can we do pious acts in front of others? Sure we can. We do it in worship, we do it on mission trips, etc. But whose attention are we seeking?
 - 2. I'll jump ahead a little, but I wonder if Jesus' exhortation to do these things in private is so that we practice them privately so that when we're in a public setting, we're conditioned to only seek the approval of God, not man.
 - iv. Also note the word "reward"
 - 1. We'll see it a couple of times in chapter 6.
 - 2. There appears to be a reward we're seeking in which we should have an expectation of receiving. **What do you think it is?**
- II. Alms-giving
- a. **Matt. 6:2** "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.
 - b. Each of these three acts of piety begins with "when." There is an expectation that we do it.
 - c. When you give alms, don't call attention to what you're doing, for hypocrites do that *that they may be praised by others*.
 - i. What is going on with the heart here? What kind of reward is being sought?
 - ii. Hypocrite is a Greek word meaning *play-actors*.

1. Hypocrisy is pretending to be something, often disingenuously.
 2. Greek actors put on masks, so in this case it's like putting on a veneer of piety for a completely different heart reason.
 3. Giving to the poor, from Jesus' perspective, ought to be something that comes from a heart moved to compassion, not to get applause from people.
- iii. The word "but" sets off a contrast.
1. Don't be like hypocrites, instead do your alms-giving in secret so that the only one seeing you is God.
 2. God is the only one we should be seeking approval from.

III. Prayer

- a. **Matt. 6:5** "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For 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. ⁶ 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.
- b. The hypocrites pray in such a way that they might be praised by others.
- c. Here, Jesus is clearly telling us that since our only audience in prayer is God, go do it in secret.
 - i. Now, I pray publicly all the time. But I learned to pray privately so that even when I pray publicly, God is the only audience I am concerned about.
 - ii. We should all pray in private and condition our hearts to kind of shut out all consideration of impressing people around us so that when we do pray in front of others, it's God's attention we're seeking.
 - iii. The Empty Room is all that matters.
- d. **Matt. 6:7** "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. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ Pray then like this:
 - i. "Greek prayers piled up as many titles of the deity addressed as possible, hoping to secure his or her attention. Pagan prayers typically reminded the deity of favors done or

sacrifices offered, attempting to get a response from the god on contractual grounds.¹”

- ii. Prayer in terms of reminding God of his character and past acts rather than what we’ve done for him.
- iii. His righteousness versus ours.
- iv. Why his name is hallowed.
- v. Kingdom and will
 - 1. Do we really want God’s will to be done in us?
 - 2. That’s another heart matter.

- vi. Petitions
 - 1. Bread
 - 2. Forgiveness
 - 3. Temptation

e. Forgiveness

- i. If we don’t forgive others, we won’t be forgiven.
- ii. Forgiveness isn’t letting people off the hook, it’s putting them on Jesus’ hook – Hogue.

f. Fasting

- i. Again, not in front of others to get the praise of man.
- ii. The purpose of fasting isn’t to draw attention to us.
- iii. The heart in relation to our actions – relationship with God.

IV. Conclusion

- a. What is true piety in the kingdom of the heavens?
- b. The heart matters

¹Craig S. Keener, [*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*](#), Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 62.