Text: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18
Title: Audience of One
Date: November 1st
Congregation: Center City Church
Main Point:

Question: Turn and greet

Intro
Usually, we have a discussion question, but the one I was going to ask was a little risky, so I'm just going to ask you to consider it now…

Have you ever done the right thing, but with the wrong motive? (2x)

When I was a Senior in high school, a group of friends decided to run for student senate. We thought it would be funny to get all the most popular male student athletes voted in as the class leaders.

Part of the motivation was that would look good on our college resumes, but mostly we just wanted to ruffle the feathers of the kids who typically were in student senate.

So - we went around to all the people in the senior class to drum up votes and enlist in the conspiracy.

And we were able to run the table and have an all male-athlete student senate for the senior class.

You're looking at Abbotsford High School's Senior Class Secretary of 2004.

Now, is it a good thing to run for student senate? Absolutely.

But, were my motives good?

No.

You might say…why does it matter that your motives were not good?

Well, let's just say, I was not the best class secretary.

In fact, I didn't even know what a secretary did…and frankly, I didn't really care.

Because of this, my senior class missed out meeting minutes. We didn't document decisions and follow up on those decisions. Things got missed. Balls were dropped. And it wasn't good.

We haven't had a class reunion for the past 20 years, and I am a little haunted by the thought that I maybe am supposed to be organizing that, but never read the job description.

What can we learn from this silly story…Our motives matter.

Our world says "as long as what you are doing doesn't hurt anyone, it's ok."

The problem is that, eventually our bad motives produce bad actions. And those bad actions eventually hurt people.

We see this with political leaders, business owners, pastors, parents, friends and spouses.

For good or for bad, our hidden motives will eventually impact our society, families, and relationships.

AND Jesus knew this.

Jesus knew that our motives matter.

And in Matthew 6, Jesus is addressing our motives.

You see, in Matthew 5, Jesus showed His followers that the good life was the God-centered life.

To be blessed meant to have your life oriented around God.

To have a right relationship with God, meant that righteousness flowed out to others.

Jesus shows us the good life in Matthew 5. Right relationship with God and others.

However, Jesus knew that just doing the right thing would not produce the good life.

He knew that "why" we do good is as important as doing the right thing.

So what is your "why" this morning?

Why do you read your Bible?

Why do you obey what God's word says?

Why do you pray?

Why do you serve?

Why are you here this morning?

In Matthew 6, we are going to see that there are really two kinds of motivations:

Man-centered motivations.

And

God-centered motivations.

And we will see that those motivations make all the difference in our experience of the good life.

Maybe you are doing all the right things in life, but still feel like you are missing out on the good life.

If so, Jesus has a word for you this morning.

He wants to give you the good life by giving you a new God-centered motivation.

Let's ask Him to do that this morning.

PRAY

Thesis Verse/Context

Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 6. If you open up the bible in the seat in front of you, there are connect cards that you can use as a note card.
Middle schoolers, as always, bring me your notes for a treat after church.

Matthew 6:1

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people…

What does Jesus want us to beware or "be aware" of?

Not zombies or ghosts.

Beware of "practicing your righteousness in front of others"

Now, Jesus just said the verse before this…

"Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" and before that he said "Your righteousness must be better than the most righteous poeple"

So, now why is Jesus saying "don't practice your righteousness in front of others?"

Some people read this verse and they think Jesus is saying “do not ever do something good in front of others.”

If that were the case you would have to come to church in a ski-mask. (Please don’t)

You could never pray with another person.

If you were going to drop a meal off at someone’s house, you would need leave the meal on the steps, ring the doorbell and run.

None of this lines up with what Jesus said in 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.”*

Jesus wants people to see our good works, so that God would get glory through us.

So, then what is Jesus saying? Look closely at the verse again…

Matthew 6:1

“*Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people* ***in order to be seen by them,***

Jesus is not saying, don’t practice your righteousness before other people.

He is saying, don’t practice your righteousness before others, IN ORDER FOR THEM TO SEE IT.

Jesus is saying “beware” of your motives.

Are you doing that good thing to be seen by others?

Jesus is warning us of the human tendency to try to be seen by others, rather than show others God’s glory.

And look at what we lose if we live to be seen by others…

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.***

Evidentally, there is a reward that comes from God when we do righteous things.

However, we miss out on that reward if we do right with the wrong motives.

V1 is the Thesis statement or main point of our passage this morning.

Jesus uses v1 as the principle.

Now he moves onto three practical examples: and looks at giving, praying and fasting.

Each of these three examples show us the difference between man-centered motives and God-centered motivation.

AND in each example, Jesus gives a promise which provides power to be God-centered.

Outline
1 man-centered motivation
2 God-centered motivation
3 The Reward that Re-centers your Motivation

1 Man-centered motivation

Giving, praying, and fasting were common mainstream practices in the Jewish culture.

If you wanted to be honored and respected in Jewish culture, you would give, pray and fast.

Today common righteous practices in our society are volunteering, donating, or voting.

Where the "I voted" sticker on Tuesday and you will get brownie points in society. Volunteer at the voting center and you will get even more brownie points.
Then donate blood the next day and you will get even more brownie points.

That's how giving, praying and fasting was at the time of this sermon.

We are going to start by seeing what man-centered our righteous deeds.

a. Man-centered giving

Matthew 6:2

[2] "*Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets,*

In each example of man-centered motivation, Jesus says "don't be like the hypocrites."

Now, what is a hypocrite?

We usually think a hypocrite is person who says one thing and does another.

Like when I tell my kids to not each too much sugar on Halloween, and then they catch me eating all the Snickers bars.

However, notice that is not how Jesus uses the word hypocrite.

The hypocrites are saying the right thing and doing the right thing!

They are giving to the needy. Probably generously.

BUT…Why are these hypocrites giving to the needy?

"*That they might be seen by others..*"

The word "hypocrite" in the original language was used to describe an actor in a play.

To be a hypocrite meant to act or perform.

Hypocrites perform righteous deeds for praise from people.

We think it's ridiculous that someone would blow a trumpet to draw attention to generosity, but how often do we want people to see how generous we are being with our resources?

Have you ever rolled down your window to give money or food to someone at a stoplight, and hoped the person in the car behind you would notice.

Maybe it's in how much we volunteer.

or how much give away on the marketplace app.

If our motivation is the praise of people, then Jesus says we are being hypocrites.

Jesus is NOT saying, don't give to the poor.

Giving to the needy is a Biblical command.

Giving to the needy shows a trust in God's provision.

Giving to the needy shows that all people have dignity because they are created in God's image.

But rather than giving as a response to God's generosity and glory, the hypocrite gives because they want glory from man.

That's man-centered giving.

We'll come back to God-centered giving, but let's look at the next example of man-centered motivation.

b Man-centered praying
Matthew 6:5

[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.***

How do hypocrites pray?

They pray in public places where they can be seen.

Prayer would happen at 9am and 3pm in Jewish society.

And those who wanted to be seen would stop on the busy street and pray, or go to the synagogue and pray.

This would earn them honor in society.

If you go to Downtown La Mesa on Friday night during farmers market and start praying really loud at a street corner people would think you're weird

But if you went out with a garbage bag and picked up trash people would praise you.

Prayer was given to us as a way to see God with our spiritual eyes.

But the hypocrite uses prayer, not to see God, but to be seen by others.

Prayer becomes a performance for the praise of man rather than a way to connect with God.

That's man-centered prayer.

This brings us to the last example of man-centered motivation.

c *Man-Centered Fasting*

Matthew 6:16

[16] "*And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others.*

I wish we could talk about fasting this morning, but instead I want to pause the sermon for an important announcement…

We are going to take a break from community groups in January.

In January, everyone is going to be invited to a meal on Wednesday nights. During that time we are going to talk about spiritual practices that will help us grow closer to God in 2027.

One of those practices is fasting. And Aimee Joseph will be teaching on that topic.

For now, all we need to know is that fasting "is praying with your body." - Tim Mackey

When we fast, we say to God "We need you more than food."

Fasting is meant to draw us closer to God.

But Jesus saw a different kind of fasting.

He saw people intentionally looking miserable in order for people to recognize that they are fasting.

Jesus gives the same warning to these hypocrites or "fake-fasters"

A hypocrite is willing to endure the discomfort of hunger, because they are hungry for the praise of man.

This is man-centered fasting that flows from man-centered motivation.

In all three examples Jesus gives a serious warning to the hypocrites with man-centered motivations…

V2, 5, 16 Truly, I say to you, they (hypocrites) have received their reward.

In other words, if your motivation was the praise of man, then that temporary and fleeting applause is all you will get.

AND Eventually the applause will stop.

The theater will clear out.

The popcorn will be on the floor.

And you will be alone having received the empty reward for your performance.

This is sobering.

When we do something to get people to notice us, no matter how good of a thing it is, there is no lasting reward.

A few of you probably think. This isn't really relevant to me.

1) Some of you aren't people-pleasers.
    a) You don't really care what people think.
    b) You just care what you think about you.
    c) G'Joe has coined the phrase "Person pleaser"
        i) This means your motivation might not be what other people think. But you still are centered on man. That man just happens to be you.
        ii) You just want to please you.
        iii) This is still man-centered motivation.
2) Some of you might think Jesus teaching here isn't relevant, because you think "I don't try to perform in giving, prayer or fasting."
    a) But do you try to perform for praise at work? School? Relationships? Sports? Ministry?
    b) Friends, we all try to perform for praise. It's not if, but where and how we try to get it.

Is there an area of your life that you are burned out?

If so, that might be an area of man-centered motivation.

Is there an area of life where you feel frustrated at others?

If so, that might be an area of man-centered motivation.

Is there an area of your life where you are insecure?

That is probably an area of your life where there is man-centered motivation.

Man-centered motivation ruins the good things in our life.

Man-centered motivation makes life all about performing.

Man-centered motivation burns us out and beats us down.

Man-centered motivation steals glory from God and keeps us from the good life.

So - Jesus wants to give us a God-centered motivation.

2 God-centered motivation

Jesus directs his attention away from the hypocrites and he looks at his followers.

In each example, Jesus says “I want Y’all to be different”

We are now going to consider what God-centered motivation looks like in each practice.

GOD-CENTERED GIVING

V3 “*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.*”

Jesus says, “rather than sounding a trumpet when you give, make your giving so private that your right hand doesn’t even know what your left hand is doing.”

Now, if anyone has figured out a way to not let their left hand know what their right hand is doing, let me know, because I still haven’t figured it out.

Jesus isn’t being literal.

Jesus knows this is impossible.

He is using an overstatement to make a point.

He is saying…when you give, you should be so unconcerned with what others think that it should be as if you don’t even know what you are giving.

He says, I know the praise from others is not the only danger.

You are also in danger of praising yourself for your giving.

People pleasers and person-pleasers aren’t off the hook.

Jesus is saying, I don’t want you to just forget what other people think of you. I want you to forget what you think of you!

Spiritual practices should produce radical self-forgetfulness.

AND

Spiritual practices should be practiced with radical self-forgetfulness.

Now look at the practical advice given someone who wants to pray with God-centered motivation.

GOD-CENTERED PRAYER
Matthew 6:6

[6] *But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father."*

How are followers of Jesus supposed to pray?

In secret.

Did anyone break this rule this morning?

Coby did!

So did I!

Scott will break this rule in a few minutes during communion.

We all just prayed in public.

Is Jesus really saying we can never pray around others?

No - we see throughout the Bible and the teachings of Jesus that praying together and in public is a good thing.

However, again - Jesus is showing us the importance of motivation.

When we pray, we are to pray as if we are just talking to God our Father.

How easy it is to pray in a group and think, "I wonder how I sound to these other people."

Or "I wonder if these people think I pray well."

Or have you ever prayed a prayer for someone, and really you are just preaching at them and hoping they hear what you are saying.

God-centered prayer is so fixated on the Father that all the people in the room fade into the backgroun.

We can pray God-centered prayers in a closet or in a crowd, if our eyes are fixed on our Father.

Lastly, look at how Jesus calls his followers to fast…

GOD-CENTERED FASTING
Matthew 6:17

[17] *But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,* [18] *that your fasting may not be seen by others…*

One Bible translation says “when you fast, take a shower and comb your hair”

Why? Fasting is about depending on God, and not seeking the praise of man.

God-centered fasting fixes our focus on the Father.

What people think doesn’t matter.

So, Jesus says “give in secret. pray in secret. Fast in secret.”

If you are tracking you might say…

James, all of that sounds like a good way to NOT be man-centered, but how is this God-centered?

That’s a great question and Jesus gives the answer at the end of each example.

Look with me at what Jesus says at the end of each of these examples…

Matthew 6:6

[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.***

Matthew 6:4

[4] so that your giving may be in secret. ***And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.***

Matthew 6:18

[18] 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.***

Jesus is saying that all your spiritual practices should be done for an Audience of One.

Who is that audience of One.

God the Father.

We were created by God to be pleasing to Him.

We were created to bring glory to Him in all we do.

That's why Jesus said earlier in the sermon on the mount.

Matthew 5:16 "*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*"

Jesus is ***saying…Don't practice righteousness for your praise, but practice righteousness for the praise of God!***

This is God-centered motivation!

If you give to the needy, give so people would see your generous God.

If you pray, pray so people would see we have a God who listens.

If you fast, fast so people will see that God is all-satisfying and sustains us.

Like Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31 "*Whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God.*"

GOD-CENTERED MOTIVATION ISN'T LOOKING TO BE SEEN BY OTHERS, BUT IS WANTS TO SHOW OTHERS OUR GLORIOUS GOD.

This has been one of the biggest struggles of my life.

I am addicted to the praise of man.

When someone tells me they are a recovering drug addict or alcoholic, I have to confess to them, I'm a recovering people-pleaser. And according to this text, I think my issue is worse.

When I was in high school, my people pleasing got exposed on the basketball court.

Every game, my joy was riding on my performance.

If I had a good game, I would feast on the praise of people.

If I had a bad game, Iwould be starved for what my soul craved.

I needed others to feed my need for praise.

My heart strings were attached to the smiles and frowns of others.

When they were smiling on me, my heart rose. When they frowned it sunk.

This made me a selfish teammate. A selfish friend. And a selfish family member.

God woke me up to see that I needed to have my motivations changed.

I needed to go from having man-centered motivation, to God-centered motivation
I tried and tried to do a better job of putting God first.

I tried and tired to not people please.

But I failed and failed and failed.

However, there was something I was missing.

What I was missing was the promise Jesus gives to His followers at the end of each example:

Look with me at the promise.

"your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (2x)

3 The Reward that Re-centers our Motivation

What is this reward?

And how does this reward recenter us on God?

All my kids play basketball at the Kroc Center, except for Joanna, my three month old. We're giving her the season off.

I'm at most of their games, standing on the sidelines.

I love watching them practice.

I love watching my children play.

And one of my favorite experiences as a dad, is when my child makes a good play.

However, it is even better when they look over at me after the play and smile.

They don't look at the coach, they don't look at the other players…

They look at me.

Why? Because this shows me that smile that matters most to them, is their father's smile.

Friends, the reward we get for living a God-centered life is the smile of the One that we were made for.

THE FATHER WHO IS IN SECRET…

…IS THE Father who is everywhere.

…He is a Father who knows our true motives.

…And He is a Father who has the power and love to give us the honor our hearts long for.

It is the smile of this Father that our souls were made for.

The more we live for His praise, the more we experience His pleasure.

The good life is knowing our Heavenly Father's smile and pleasure.

When the Father's smile is all we need, than we become the most self-forgetful people.

We don't care what people think. We don't even care what we think.

We aren't performing for praise from people.

Friends, don't you want this God-centered motivation.

Don't you want to live for His praise and His pleasure?

And have you struggled with the incredible draw towards people or person-pleasing is too strong?

Friends, the Father knew that we wouldn't be able to break free from our man-centered motivations and people pleasing.

That's why He sent His God-centered Son.

Jesus, the Son of God, basked in the smile of His Father's pleasure for all eternity.

Jesus glorified the Father in all He did…

Jesus said in John 4:34

[34] …*"My food is to do the will of him (the Father) who sent me and to accomplish his work.*

Jesus said in John 17:4

[4] I (Jesus) glorified you (the Father) on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

Jesus' greatest pleasure was to do the will of the Father.

Jesus greatest pleasure was to see the Father praised.

Jesus never sought the praise of the crowds or the big-shots of His time.

Jesus was willing to be rejected by everyone, because He knew the pleasure of His Heavenly Father was better than the praise of man.

Not only didn't Jesus seek the praise of man, he was willing to be shamed and mocked and rejected for the glory of the Father.

This is the best news in the universe hypocrite man-centered people pleasers like us.

Jesus didn't just call us out, but called us to Himself.

He wanted to share the reward of the Father's pleasure with us.

So Jesus went to the cross to die for all our man centered motivations.

He died with the perfect motivation to glorify His Father.

Even as the Father's smile started turned to wrath for our sin, Jesus never wavered in His God-centered motivation.

It was for the joy set before Him that He endured the cross.

He saw the Father's glory and He saw the good that was on the other side, and so He died.

The Father was so pleased with His Son that He raised Him from the dead and brought Him back into His heavenly presence.

Now, any man-centered hypocrite can come to the Father through Jesus and be re-centered on God.

And when we come, we won't be turned away.

Instead, we will hear the Father say "I'm glad you came. I'm so pleased that you came. Now, let my praise and pleasure recenter you on Me."

Paul says in Ephesians

Ephesians 2:4 "*But God, being rich in mercy,…raised us up with him (Jesus) and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that* ***in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.***

Friends, God wants to lavish honor on you through His Son.

"Immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

This reality showed crush our man-centered motivations.

We don't need honor from man, when we've been seated at the place of highest honor in God's presence through Christ!

When we set our minds on the glory and praise above, the praise below looses it's draw.

When we bask in the Father's smile, the smiles and frowns of others lose their power.

The more we live for the glory of our Father, the more we experience His pleasure.

The more we experience His pleasure, the less we need the praise of man.

Friends, let's bring our real selves to the real Jesus this morning…

Application:
What's one area in your life that you live for the praise of man?

What would it look like to have God-centered motivation in that area of your life?

Here is a prayer you can pray with me…

Father, I am sorry for living in a man-centered way in this area of my life.

Father, thank you for giving us Jesus, who was perfectly God-centered in all his motivations.

Jesus, thank you for being rejected so I can be accepted and honored by the Father.

Holy Spirit, let the pleasure of the Father cause me to stop living for the praise of man, but rather live for His glory.

Amen.

PRAY