DO THE RIGHT THING FOR THE RIGHT REASON

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By Pastor Stan
Matthew 6:1-4

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-- We're continuing our study in the first book of the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew; and we are in Matthew's account of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which is in chapters 5, 6, and 7. We have just finished chapter 5 and today are starting in chapter 6. So get a Bible and go to Matthew 6.
-- Let's do a brief review of what we have seen so far in this magnificent sermon. Jesus is addressing this sermon to His disciples, all those who are following Him. Jesus is telling us what it means to be His follower, to live as a disciple in God's Kingdom. Here's what we have learned in chapter 5:

1. The Character of Disciples: The Beatitudes (5:1-12)
2. The Influence of Disciple: Salt & Light (5:13-16)
3. The Life of Disciples (5:17f)
   (Key verse, v. 20)

Jesus' Teaching about Righteousness (vv. 21-48)

? Jesus contrasts the teachings of the religious leaders with His teachings: Murder / Hate
Eye for eye / Turn the other cheek
Love neighbors & hate enemies / Love enemies

Jesus' Warning about Threats to Righteousness

-- In chapter 6 Jesus warns about two serious threats to a disciple's life.
(1) Whom you seek to please
(2) Where you find your security

-- Today, we are looking at the first threat: whom you seek to please.
Cf., 6:1

I. The Warning (v. 1)

A. The Right Motive

1. What Jesus is telling us here in this verse is that we need to be sure that we are not only doing the right thing but that we are also doing it for the right reason.

2. At first reading what Jesus says here seems to contradict what He said earlier in the Sermon.

Cf., 5:16

What Jesus tells us in that verse is to let the light of our good acts shine so that people can see them. Now, He tells us in 6:1 not to do good acts so that people can see them. But Jesus, of course, is not contradicting Himself. Back in chapter 5 Jesus is saying to us that when we live as His disciples our lives are like light shining in a dark world and people will be seeing us, watching how we live; so we need to live in such a way that what they see will cause them to give glory to God - not to us but to God. The motive in how we live our lives is to glorify God. And that's the same thing that Jesus is saying to us here in the first verse of chapter 6. Jesus is warning us against living a good life so that people will see how good we are and praise us, give us glory. Jesus is warning us against seeking self-glory instead of God's glory.

B. The Right Audience

1. "To be seen"

-- When Jesus says "to be seen," He uses a Greek word that is the source of our English word "theater." In a sense, we're all living life on a stage. It's virtually impossible to live your life so

that no one can see what you do.

2. What Audience We Seek to Please

-- The real issue that Jesus is putting to us here is this: what audience will you seek to please - people or God?

a. People

-- Our natural inclination is to live for the audience of people - to seek the approval and applause of people.

b. God

-- But Jesus is calling us to live for a different audience - for an "Audience of One," to live for God, to seek His approval. The motivation for a disciple is to live their life in a way that pleases God first and foremost.

II. The Application (vv. 2-4)

-- Jesus applies this principle of seeking to please God to 3 actions commonly practiced by the religious leaders in Jesus' day - giving, praying, and fasting. Today we will look at what Jesus says about giving.

A. Negative: How Not to Give (v. 2)

-- Jesus first tells us how not to give in verse 2.

v. 2

1. Giving to the Needy

-- The focus here, of course, is on giving to the needy, something that was especially important in Jesus' day. There were large numbers of poor people, and their only source of assistance was almsgiving, money given by individuals as a personal act of charity.

-- Such giving to the poor is an emphasis throughout the Bible.

Leviticus 25:35 If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner

Deuteronomy 15:11 For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.

1 John 3:17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

James 2:15-16 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, **¹⁶**and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? **¹⁷**So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

2. Avoiding the Hypocrisy of the Pharisees

a. Jesus warns us here to avoid the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. The word "hypocrite" takes us back again to the Greek theater. Originally, the term "hupokritos" was used for a Greek actor who played a role on stage by holding a mask in front of his face. The actor was hiding his true identity and pretending to be someone that he really wasn't.

b. It was the hypocrisy of the Pharisees that elicited Jesus' strongest denunciations.

Matthew 23:5a, 25, 27 They do all their deeds to be seen by others. … Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. …**²⁷**"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.

The Pharisees' Hypocritical Giving

-- One of the places where the Pharisees were hypocrites was in their giving to the poor.

-- Jesus says that they would "sound the trumpet" when they gave. It's possible that they literally did that but more likely that this is a hyperbole, an intentionally exaggerated image used to describe the great production in ostentatious the way they gave. We might say today that they were experts at "blowing their own horn." In other words, they made sure that other people noticed how generous they were being so they people would be impressed with the Pharisees' righteousness.

-- The Pharisees wanted the applause of people, and that's what they got - that and nothing more - nothing from God.

If you want God's approval and applause, look at verses 3-4.

B. Positive: How to Give (vv. 3-4)

-- What Jesus tells us here is how to give in a way that wins God's applause and brings God's approval and blessing.

1. The Opposite of the Pharisees

-- What Jesus describes here is just the opposite of the showy display made by the Pharisees. Jesus instructs us to give in such a modest, low-key manner that not only others don't know but also our own left hand doesn't know what our right hand is doing.

2. Some think that Jesus' words mean that it's wrong to keep a record of one's giving or to do something like send out a giving statement. I don't think that's what Jesus is intending. What Jesus is wanting here is for us to examine our motives - why we are giving. Are we giving to get the applause of people or to please God? The manner of our giving should match the motive for our giving. If we are giving to please God, then our giving should not be a theatrical production that draws attention to us. When we give without desiring attention or recognition from people, God will see and be pleased with what we do.

CONCLUSION

What Jesus is saying to us here is illustrated in the story of this photo that went viral a few years ago. The policeman in the photo is NYPD Office Lawrence DePrimo. On a cold November night in 2012 Officer DePrimo was on a counterterrorism assignment patrolling Times Square when he saw a homeless man who was barefooted. DePrimo had a good pair of shoes and two socks, and his feet were still cold. DePrimo went up to the homeless man and asked if the man had anything to cover his feet. The man replied that he didn't have any shoes and then added, "But God bless you" and walked away. Officer DePrimo went to the man and asked his shoe size and then went immediately into a shoe store and told the clerk that he wanted to but a pair of good boots. A few minutes later Officer DePrimo walked out with a $100 pair of warm all-weather boots, size 12, and took them to the homeless man. DePrimo wasn't looking for any recognition; he just wanted the man to be able to keep his feet warm. This marvelously kind act would have gone unnoticed except for a tourist from Arizona named Jennifer Foster, who took this photo with her cellphone. Concerning the incident, Foster remarked, "The officer expected NOTHING in return and did not know that I was watching." Later, Jennifer posted the photo to the NYPD Facebook page, and the photo and story immediately went viral.

This story illustrates 2 important aspects of what Jesus is telling us in today's passage:

1. Officer DePrimo didn't do what he did for any public attention or recognition. He saw a homeless man who needed shoes and wanted to give him a pair.

2. Although DePrimo didn't know it, someone was watching him and recorded the good act. You may never have someone take an anonymous photo of your quiet acts of goodness, but you can be sure that someone is always watching. God sees and one day will reward every act of goodness done to show His love.