Different On Purpose: Smiling Through the Sacrifice Matthew 6:16-18

Passage

Matthew 6:16-18 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.

Fasting Is Expected, Not Exceptional

Assertion

- Jesus assumes His followers will fast. “When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites…” (v. 16)

Possible Objection

- Hold on, fasting feels extreme. Isn’t that more for monks, pastors, or super-spiritual people? I am just trying to live faithfully in everyday life.

- Joel 2:12 Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.

Application

- Fast from something we regularly depend on (coffee, social media, food etc.) Then replace that time with focused prayer, even if it’s just 5-10 minutes.
- Why It Matters: Fasting isn't about becoming more spiritual than others; it's about becoming more dependent on God.

The Danger Is Performing, Not Practicing

Assertion

- Jesus doesn’t criticize fasting itself; He critiques how it’s done. “They disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others…” (v. 16)

Possible Objection

- But if people notice I’m fasting, is that automatically wrong? Am I supposed to hide everything?

- Galatians 1:10 For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Application

- Before we do it, ask: “Would I still do this if nobody ever found out?” Then do it and don’t tell anyone.
- Why It Matters: When people become the audience, God stops being the focus.

Seeking Human Approval Cancels Eternal Reward

Assertion

- “Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.” (v. 16)

Possible Objection
- That feels harsh. What's wrong with a little encouragement or recognition? Isn't affirmation a good thing?

- Colossians 3:23-24 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

Application
- Build a 10-second habit: Pause → Check motive → Proceed
- Why It Matters: If applause is what we are seeking, applause is all we will receive.

<u>True Fasting Is Intentionally Unnoticeable</u>

Assertion
- "But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face…" (v. 17)

Possible Objection
- Wait, so I'm supposed to look normal? Even happy? Isn't that fake if I'm actually struggling?

- Philippians 2:3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Application
- If we fast this week: go about our day as usual, don't draw attention to it, and don't subtly hint at it ("I'm just really drained today…").
- Why It Matters: When our sacrifice is for God, we don't need to advertise it to people.

<u>God Sees What Others Never Will</u>

Assertion
- "Your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (v. 18)

Possible Objection
- But if no one sees it, it feels unnoticed… even insignificant. Does it really matter?

- Hebrews 4:13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Application
- Choose a specific place + specific time and protect it like an appointment.
- Why It Matters: What people don't see, God never misses.

<u>Joy In Fasting Comes From Who We Are Seeking</u>

Assertion
- Jesus assumes something radical: that fasting doesn't have to look miserable.

Possible Objection
- How can I be joyful when I'm giving something up? Isn't fasting supposed to feel like loss?

- Psalm 16:11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Application
- Don't just remove something; redeem the space:
    - When we feel hunger → pray
    - When we miss what we gave up → turn that into worship or Scripture reading
- Why It Matters: When God is worth more than what we are giving up, sacrifice becomes an expression of joy.

Conclusion
- So here's the invitation: Live for the audience of One.