

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT – MATTHEW 5-7

Living Before the Father Who Sees in Secret

Matthew 6:1-4 | Faith Church of Linden

By Daniel Patz on October 4, 2026

INTRODUCTION

Let me begin by reading our text – Matthew 6:1-4

When's the last time someone else received credit for something you did. What went on in your heart?

How do you feel when you give sacrificially because you want to serve the Lord but you don't get thanked or encouraged by the one you did so much for?

Have you every done something that everyone says is awesome – helping someone out, a beautiful prayer, an inspiring post of social media – and yet you knew that your motives were wrong?

We now move to the second chapter of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6. Martyn Lloyd-Jones describes this chapter as one of the most uncomfortable in all of scripture. I think it is because it brings us to the great danger of religious life, and that is hypocrisy. We can think we are doing so good and our hearts are so far away and in bondage to self.

This chapter brings us to the FATHER! The word “Father,” referring to God, is found eleven times in this chapter and seventeen times in the Sermon on the Mount. In comparison, Mark uses it only four times and Luke seventeen. We find it twice in our text this morning.

He is Father, and he is heavenly Father, or our Father in heaven. This is meant to connote personal intimacy as well as transcendent glory. He is close, and he is also very different from us. It is meant to bring personal security, and also awe, fear, and the desire to honor and respect him.

He has told us that we must be perfect as your Father is perfect. You have a Father because Jesus has revealed him to you and you have believed. You are given Christ’s righteousness and now He is making this new person in you by the Holy Spirit. He now comes to a warning. It runs from verse 1 to verse 21, and its theme is how we live out our devotion to God in our personal actions of religious worship, what is often called personal piety. Verses 1 through 18 cover three acts of personal devotion: giving, praying, and fasting. Verses 19 through 21 conclude the unit and lead us into the next section – our relationship to daily life in the world.

Here is the danger. Francis Grimké, a preacher, put it this way about his own profession:

“Too often, we preachers feel that we are not succeeding unless someone is constantly swinging the censer under

*our noses [the incense of praise to the preacher]...
Unfortunately, too many of us want to be praised. We look for it; we expect it. It is certainly a weakness, a pitiable weakness, a thing to be ashamed of. We ought to be content to do our work, with no thought of self, but only of the glory of God. Too many of us are like the Pharisees in this respect. It is the glory of man that we are thinking of and that we are hankering most for.”*

Grimké, 10–11

Preachers are tempted this way, and I know that it is true for the rest of us? Every one of us wants to be seen, thanked, and noticed for what we do for God.

With this in mind, I want us to see two main points. The first is a principle found in verse 1 that will be driven home with three illustrations all the way through verse 18. The second brings us through the text, especially verses 2 through 4, with the first illustration – they shine light on the prince – like a good illustration.

I hope we will get to the heart of this. It shines a mirror on our hearts and tests our motives, and I believe it should drive us to our knees before our Savior, who will help us and give us eyes to see the goodness of our Father, and to seek his reward instead of the praise of man. So let's look at them.

1. A PRINCIPLE TO WARN US (V. 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.”

Matthew 6:1

Jesus begins with a warning. **Beware that your acts of personal devotion to God are not hijacked into devotion to self: living for the praise of people, and losing the reward of your Father who sees in secret.** The acts themselves are good. Giving, praying, and fasting are what Jesus is about to assume his followers will do. The danger is what happens inside them, when the practice meant for God gets turned toward ourselves.

The tension with 5:16 Highlights the Point

Maybe some of you are already thinking of what Jesus said only a few verses earlier.

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 5:16

So which is it? Are we to be seen, or not to be seen? The difference is motive and audience. In 5:16 the aim is that others see and give glory

to the Father. In 6:1 the aim is to be seen so that they will think well of me. The same act can be done for two completely different reasons. Remember Salt and Light.

A. B. Bruce: "We are to show when tempted to hide and hide when tempted to show."

Reward in the Sermon on the Mount

Notice the word reward in verse 1. Treasure and reward language runs throughout this sermon. Jesus says in the Beatitudes that our reward is great in heaven (5:12), and here he warns that we can lose it. This is not a mercenary way of earning favor. It is relational, and it is how God works. We don't earn or merit reward. It comes from grace. God offers it, and by faith we take hold of it.

"And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."

Hebrews 11:6

We seek a lasting reward from God that does not wear out. This is the life of faith. To chase the praise of people is to trade something that lasts for something that fades by the time we reach the parking lot.

2. AN ILLUSTRATION TO ENLIGHTEN US (VV. 2–4)

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.”

Matthew 6:2–4

This is the first of three illustrations. Watch for the pattern, because it repeats in each one. First, “when you . . .” Second, “not like the hypocrites . . . they have received their reward.” Third, “your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” We will see that same shape again in prayer and in fasting.

A. The Practice Assumed

Notice that Jesus says “when,” not “if.” He assumes giving rather than prescribing it. He assumed it because of the society he lived in and because of the Old Testament, which is full of God’s heart for the poor.

“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.”

Proverbs 19:17

See also Deuteronomy 15:11, Exodus 23:11, and James 1:27.

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.'"

This sermon isn't mainly about almsgiving, but that point is worth making. If you are a follower of Christ, your hand is open to the needy. It is loving and **sacrificial**.

True religion has acts of personal devotion, the practice of godliness. Jesus gives three examples: giving, which is sacrifice; prayer, which is self-discipline; and fasting, which is self-denial.

God intends deliberate, disciplined devotion. Our culture often thinks something isn't a virtue unless it's spontaneous. That isn't true. There should be planned times of praying, fasting, and giving. We don't drift into godliness. We do it because we are seeking the Father...not because we want to get man's praise.

There are other acts of devotion we could name, such as singing, Bible reading and meditation, serving, and preaching. And that last one brings it home to me as a pastor. I can preach a sermon, even this one, for the wrong reason.

The external actions matter, but they are not enough. Motive matters. And that brings us back to the principle.

LET ME MAKE THIS CLEAR – And this is the foundation of everything. There is one deliberate act of devotion that saves us – that is the act of Christ dying for our sins on the cross to save us and wipe our sins and bringing us into the family of God. This is what makes us children of God and we keep returning to this glorious act that produces in us a real heart of devotion.

B. The Hypocrite's Motive Exposed

When devotion is a social norm, the pious practices meant to be directed toward God can be turned toward ourselves: toward our own reputation, safety, and security in society. In Jesus's day, to be seen as generous was to be seen as godly. To be seen as godly was to be admired, praised, and honored.

Jesus says, "sound no trumpet before you." Was that literal? It is probably not, though it could be. It may refer to the trumpet-shaped offering chests in the temple, or to trumpets blown at public fasts. We can't be certain. Either way, the warning is against showmanship and chasing human approval.

Here is the word Jesus uses: hypocrite. A hypocrite is one who practices acts of devotion to God for the sake of the praise of others. The Greek word, *hypokrites*, means a stage actor, someone who performs behind a mask.

There are three kinds of hypocrites. First, there are those who knowingly live a double life, who know they are faking it. They live a double life. Second, there are those who think they are righteous but others can see through, they are self-righteous who look down on others and compare themselves – "thank God I am not like so and so". And third, there is the generous giver whose devotion is really to their own name. This person is self-deceived. No one else would suspect

them. And the praise of others only feeds it. This third category is what Jesus is talking about.

Not all giving pleases God. Not all religious acts are righteous acts.

Remember 5:20:

“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:20

Jesus wants a wholehearted righteousness, lived and real, in a believer changed by grace. The hypocrite’s righteousness does not exceed the Pharisees’, and what he forfeits is the Father’s reward, which is the text’s own language. As in the six antitheses, this concerns thoughts and intentions, not just actions. It asks why we do these acts and whose reward we are seeking.

So let’s hold the mirror up. Questions for us:

1. What are my motives when I post Scripture and quotes on social media?
2. What are my motives when I serve others in need, including my family?
3. What are my motives when I sacrifice to help someone in a hard situation?

4. What do I do when no one thanks me? When someone else gets the credit?
5. Am I really okay doing the right things in secret, because I believe God is watching and I love him?

C. The Remedy Given: Living Before the Father Who Sees in Secret (6:3-4)

“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. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”
(6:3-4)

Jesus gives the remedy: “do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” Don’t read that as a literalist. It doesn’t mean you have to fear giving records for taxes, or that you may only give in cash. Get to the principle, which is not to do your acts for recognition. And don’t trust your motives – ask God for help and be careful.

But the real remedy is not a technique. It is the foundation, who our Father is. We carried this from the last sermon, and it comes in three tenses.

I want to do this in secret because I want to guard against the showmanship of doing things that are devotion to my Father but really a way of looking good together.

I will give to the poor because Jesus became poor for me. He made me rich for now I am a son of God – He is my Father. Jesus took my

sin and paid my debt. I will give trust in His provision and thanking Him for His watchcare. I will give to honor and reflect Him to the World but remember that I never do anything good apart from His work of grace to help me do that good – so I must never take the credit – HE gets the glory. And I must not trust my heart because I have a tendency to love the praise of man and be self-deceived – beware!

As I said last week – my life is marked by a new pastor, present, and Future – that is engulfed in the presence and goodness of my Father because of Christ.

Past. Christ laid down his life for us. We were enemies and are now family: rescued, loved, and justified by grace. Never give up that past. You are not giving to earn a place in the family. You were brought in at the cost of his life. He is your Father and is always present! Nothing matters more.

Present. God is our Father by nature and by nurture. We have been born of God (John 1:12–13), his seed is in us, and the Spirit within us cries, “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15). And he nurtures us. That nurture is how we fight the fear of man and the praise of man. Christ himself did not seek his own glory:

“Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he judges.”

John 8:50

The Son who had every right to glory lived for the Father's approval alone. Our Elder Brother shows us how a son lives.

Future. Because he is our Father and cares for us, we live trusting him for his reward. He is always watching, and he will judge justly.

He knows our hearts. He knows if we serve so people will thank us. He knows if we give to be thought good givers. He knows if the pastor preaches for the praise of man. So we grow in awareness that God is always watching, and that his praise matters more than anything.

And notice where Jesus is heading. Verses 19 through 21 say:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 6:19–21

Laying up treasure in heaven includes doing these things to please the Father and seek his glory. Laying up treasure begins by making the reward of the Father – pleasing Him – central to your heart!

And disciples of Jesus hear these words and cry out – help me – forgive me – I am a sinner. And Jesus has and does...and He works

in us to free us from the praise of self to the praise of our Father in heaven.

CONCLUSION

Blessedness. Remember where this SERMON (on the Mount) began. The flourishing, happy life belongs to the poor in spirit, the meek, the pure in heart. They shall see God. Oh, the freedom of not living for ourselves anymore. Oh, the joyful freedom of not having to put on a silly face and pretend we're something we're not. Oh to know that Jesus died for our sins and that our Father looks upon us and we can serve Him not get him to love us but because He loves us!

“Be perfect as your Father is perfect” means wholeness. We are not play actors with a stage character and a real self. We are one: rescued children of God who give to the poor, pray earnestly, and seek him in fasting and repentance in devotion to God – and not to show off to others. What a humbling and happy reality that we have a Father who knows and cares and all that matters is what He thinks.

Look to Christ our Savior this morning and ask Him to give you the spiritual help to care about the watching eye of God and not the fading praise of man.