

The Sermon on the Mount

Charitable Deeds (Matthew 6:1-4)

INTRODUCTION:

- I. The most profound sermon in the history of mankind is the one recorded in the **fifth, sixth and seventh chapters of Matthew's** inspired account of the life of Jesus Christ.
 - A. We know this sermon as "The Sermon on the Mount" because Jesus preached it on hillside in Galilee while surrounded by a "multitude" of followers.
 1. I believe it's important for us to truly understand what this means because there are some today who believe the teachings of Jesus were never meant for US – never meant for CHRISTIANS living in the 21st century.
 - a. Some say Jesus was merely correcting misunderstandings the Jewish people of His day had about the Law of Moses.
 - b. In other words, they say Jesus was merely acting as any good Rabbi would, by taking His disciples back to the real intent of the Law of Moses which had become obscured by all the endless traditions of the scribes and Pharisees.

- c. They say Jesus simply wanted to clarify their misunderstandings about the Law.
- B. While I believe Jesus DID clarify misunderstandings people of His day had about the TRUE INTENT of the Law of Moses, the teaching of Jesus on this and other occasions was FAR MORE.
1. To Jesus, this sermon was the GOSPEL or the GOOD NEWS of the coming kingdom.
 - a. **Matthew 4:23** – *And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.*
 2. The KINGDOM Matthew refers to in this passage is the KINGDOM Jesus came to establish by shedding of His blood on Calvary and by His glorious resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven to sit at the right hand of God as King of kings and Lord of lords over His spiritual kingdom, the church.
 3. Therefore, the teachings of Jesus here and elsewhere were NOT just meant for the Jews of His day, they are the ETERNAL PRINCIPLES – ETERNAL TRUTHS God set in order from the VERY BEGINNING OF TIME.
 - a. These principles of faith and conduct even PREDATE the Law of Moses.

- b. They are TIMELESS TRUTHS – TIMELESS PRINCIPLES – that God expects EVERY GENERATION to live by.
- c. And these timeless truths are EVERY BIT a part of the GOSPEL OF CHRIST TODAY as they were of the LAW OF MOSES over 2,000 years ago.

C. So what are they?

- 1. A brief review of **Matthew chapter 5** tells us what these timeless principles – these eternal truths – are all about.
 - a. They are about our need to be poor in spirit, and mourn over the sins that separate us from our God.
 - b. They teach us to be meek and gentle, to hunger and thirst after true, genuine righteousness.
 - c. They tell us to be merciful, and pure in heart, and to be peacemakers.
 - d. And they teach us to willingly suffer persecution for the sake of righteousness.
- 2. These timeless principles – these eternal truths – are also about the disciples of Jesus Christ being the salt of the earth and the light of the world.
 - a. They are about you and I as Christians being a positive influence in this world to keep back moral and ethical decay.

- b. And about you and I being the example of Jesus before others so that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.
3. These timeless principles – these eternal truths that even predate the Law of Moses – are about having absolute respect and reverence for the Law of God because we LIVE these principles out in our daily lives – unlike the scribes and Pharisees who merely put on an external show of righteousness.
 4. These timeless principles are as much for us today as they were for the disciples of Jesus two thousand years ago:
 - a. They teach us to never harbor hatred in our heart, nor think that lusting in the heart is okay as long as we don't act on that lust.
 - b. They tell us we need to hold the sanctity of marriage to the highest level, and never think we can terminate a marriage for ANY reason other than the unfaithfulness of our mate.
 - c. They teach us about the need to be honest and keep the promises and the oaths we make.
 - d. They tell us to never seek revenge, but rather love our enemies, and do good to those who malign and persecute us – just like Jesus did when HE was being maligned, persecuted, beaten and crucified.

- D. I challenge ANYONE to look back over the TIMELESS and ETERNAL TRUTHS Jesus taught in **Matthew chapter 5** and name ONE ETERNAL TRUTH that is NOT for you and I as Christians today.
1. Not ONLY are these wonderful, divine truths recorded for us in **Matthew chapter 5**, we will continue to find principles and truths by which WE are to live in the REST of the Sermon on the Mount recorded in **Matthew chapters 6 and 7**.
 2. In fact, let's notice what Jesus has to say in **Matthew chapter 6** about the PROPER way to display a Christ-like spirit when we do good for others – when we perform charitable deeds in giving to the needs of others.

BODY:

- I. In the **sixth chapter of Matthew** Jesus once again contrasts the RIGHTEOUSNESS He expects of His disciples from the so-called righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees – the Jewish religious leaders of His day.
 - A. The principle – the fundamental truth – that Jesus laid down for HIS disciples is this: **Matthew 5:20** – *unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*

1. Therefore, when we come to the **sixth chapter of Matthew** we find Jesus contrasting the phony, deceitful, hypocritical righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees with the sincere, genuine, from-the-heart kind of righteous that Jesus expects of you and me.
- B. Let's begin by reading the **first four verses of Matthew chapter 6**, and then learn the principles by which you and I are to live today.
1. **Matthew 6:1-4** – *"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. 2 Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 3 But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly."*
- C. To understand the significance of what Jesus is saying here, let's first consider the issue – in other words, what was the problem with the hypocrites, as Jesus calls them (probably a reference to the scribes and Pharisees) – what was the problem with the way they were performing charitable deeds?

1. Jesus summed up the manner in which the hypocrite did their charitable deeds by saying they were being done "*before MEN, to be seen by THEM*" (**v. 1**), and so "*that they may have glory from MEN*" (**v. 2**)
2. In other words, it seemed the whole purpose for the charitable deeds of the hypocrite was NOT to help someone in need, nor to glorify GOD, nor to receive praise from GOD for being loving, compassionate, and sacrificial.
3. The whole purpose for the charitable deeds of the hypocrite was to be NOTICED by others, to be held in HIGH ESTEEM by others, to be PRAISED and REVERED by others.
4. In his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew Henry put it this way: "They did it... but not from any principle of obedience to God, or love to man, but in pride and vain-glory; not in compassion to the poor, but purely for ostentation, that they might be extolled as good men, and so might gain an interest in the esteem of the people..." (Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible)
5. In fact, Jesus went on to say, **Matthew 6:2** – *Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, DO NOT SOUND A TRUMPET before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men.*

- a. While some commentators aren't sure what Jesus may have meant here – since there is nothing mentioned in Jewish writings of the practice of sounding a trumpet when giving alms to the poor – other commentators have said there's a very simple explanation.
- b. One of the most common trumpets used in Jewish ceremonial worship was the Shofar – a trumped made from a twisted rams horn, as shown in this photo.
- c. Some commentators suggest that the boxes used to collect alms for the poor had a Shofar, or a twisted rams horn, inserted in a hole at the top of the box so that coins could be put in the large opening of the Shofar and roll down inside of the horn and fall into the box – this was so coins could be put in, but none could be taken out by tipping the box up-side-down.
- d. So, someone who wanted to make a SPECTACLE of donating coins to the poor would slowly drop one coin at a time into the large opening of the Shofar, and the coins rattle all the way down inside the rams horn until they finally fell into the box – thus “*SOUNDING THE TRUMPET*”.

D. Therefore, when someone gives to the poor or to those in need in such a way as to draw attention to THEMSELVES – to receive the glory and praise of others - Jesus said, *“Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward”*. **(Matthew 6:2)**

1. In other words, they have the reward they are seeking – the praise of men, but NOT the praise of God.
2. The ONLY reward they will receive is to be held in high esteem by OTHERS, but they will receive NOTHING in the form of praise from GOD.

II. So, let's look at these verses once again and see the TIMELESS PRINCIPLES – those ETERNAL TRUTHS – that are to govern OUR acts of charity.

A. Depending on the translation of the Bible you're using, you've probably noticed a slight difference in the choice of words various versions use in these verses.

1. For example, in Matthew 6:1;
 - a. The KJV: *“Take heed that ye do not your **alms** before men, to be seen of them...”*
 - b. The NKJV: *“Take heed that you do not do your **charitable deeds** before men, to be seen by them.”*

- c. The NIV: *"Be careful not to do your **acts of righteousness** before men, to be seen by them."*
 - d. The NASV: *"Beware of practicing your **righteousness** before men to be noticed by them..."*
 - e. The RSV: *"Beware of practicing your **piety** before men in order to be seen by them..."*
2. While some translations seem to focus on almsgiving or charitable deeds, other translations focus more on ALL ACTS of righteousness or piety.
- a. So, which one is the most correct?
 - b. Both, actually. It seems Jesus is using almsgiving or charitable deeds as an example of ANY act of righteousness that could be done simply to draw attention to ourselves, and thereby be held in his esteem or be praised by others.
 - c. In other words, Jesus is specifically speaking about ANY righteous act that is done simply to make us look good in the eyes of others.
- B. But, let's not misunderstand a basic principle here. Jesus is NOT saying we should be SECRETIVE about acts of righteousness.
1. **Matthew 5:16** – *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."*

- a. Jesus made it clear that we ARE to let our example of godly living and our good works BE SEEN by others so that GOD is glorified.
2. However, Jesus wanted to make certain that ANY acts of righteousness we do before others should NEVER be for OUR glory, but for the glory of GOD.
 - a. We should NEVER do acts of righteousness JUST TO BE SEEN OF MEN.
3. So, once again, Jesus addresses the attitude of our HEART.
 - a. When it comes to doing good for others, or any other act of righteousness, are we doing it simply to receive attention from OTHERS, or are we doing it to bring honor and glory to GOD?
 - b. GOD is honored when we let our light so shine before others that we glorify HIM, but God is DISHONORED when we let our light so shine before others to glorify OURSELVES.
 - c. In essence, we have removed GOD from the place of honor, and put OURSELVES there.
- C. What are the CONSEQUENCES of ignoring this principle of having the right MOTIVE when it comes to all the acts of righteousness we do before others?

1. **Matthew 6:1** – *"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven."*
2. In fact, if you remember, Jesus said the ONLY reward we receive in this instance is the praise we get from others (**v. 2**).
3. We certainly WON'T receive praise from God.

III. So, how ARE we to do charitable deeds or perform acts of righteousness in such a way to avoid drawing attention to ourselves – either INTENTIONALLY or UNINTENTIONALLY?

A. Jesus said: **Matthew 6:3-4** – *"But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly."*

1. What did Jesus mean by the phrase, *"Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing"*? (**v. 3**)
 - a. I've heard all kinds of explanations of this verse, including:
 - (1). Reach down in your pocket for money or pull money out of your wallet and give it to someone in need without really knowing how much you're giving.

- (2). Don't reach in your pocket for money with your left hand and look at how much it is as you pass it to your right hand to give to someone.
- b. Quite honestly, I don't think either of those explanations are what Jesus is talking about.
2. The Lord is using a figure of speech here – a metaphor – as He's done in other passages, to make a point. The point is simply this:
- a. If there is the slightest chance that your MOTIVE for giving to someone, or for doing any other act of righteousness, is to draw attention to YOU then do it in secret.
- b. This is the one time when Jesus said it's better to NOT allow others to see your good works because those acts may inadvertently draw attention to YOU – and YOU begin to enjoy the attention.
- c. So in those instances, when there is even the slightest chance that the glory will go to YOU rather than to GOD then do it in such a manner as to draw little or no attention to you.
3. When our motive is to give GOD all the glory, then Jesus said:
"your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly."
- (v. 4)**

a. The Lord will reward us openly in this life:

(1). **Psalms 41:1-3** – *Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. 2 The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he will be blessed on the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. 3 The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed.*

b. And the Lord will certainly reward us openly in the life to come:

(1). **Ecclesiastes 12:14** – *For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.*

(2). **2 Corinthians 5:10** – *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

(3). **1 Timothy 6:17-19** – *Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing*

up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

III. In closing, let's turn our attention to an example during New Testament times when this principle of having the proper motive in giving was violated.

A. During the weeks following the first Pentecost after Jesus was resurrected from the dead, a crisis began to develop in the city of Jerusalem.

1. Thousands upon thousands of devout Jews had come to Jerusalem from distant homelands to celebrate the Passover.
2. But after learning that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and after being baptized into Christ, and becoming disciples of Jesus, they chose to remain in Jerusalem to learn more about Jesus and His kingdom from the apostles.
3. In time, their money ran out, and they became destitute – not only unable to return home, but not even able to pay for food.
4. So, those who had lands and possessions sold them and brought the profits to the apostles to give out to anyone who had need.
5. There are many examples of this charitable giving in the first four chapters of the book of Acts.
6. But one act of giving stood out above all the rest – not because it was done out of genuine love and compassion, but because it was

done simply to draw attention to those giving and to gain the praise of others.

B. This example concerns a man by the name of Ananias and his wife Sapphira in Acts chapter 5.

1. **Acts 5:1-5** – *But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. 2 And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? 4 While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." 5 Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last.*

a. The problem was not that Ananias and his wife Sapphira kept back a portion of the sale of their land for themselves – there was nothing wrong with that.

(1). In fact, Peter tells Ananias that while the land was in his possession, it was his to do with as he chose.

(2). And even after the land was sold, it was still his to decide how much he wanted to give to those in need.

- (3). So there was nothing wrong with Ananias and Sapphira keeping a portion of the sale for themselves.
- b. The problem was that they LIED about the amount they received for the sale of the land.
 - c. They tried to make others believe that they were giving ALL they received for the sale of their land – maybe even trying to make others think they could have gotten more for the land if they had kept it on the market longer, but accepted less for the land so that they could give the proceeds to the poor now rather than later.
 - d. And so, the Lord struck Ananias dead on the spot – and the same thing happened to his wife who came along later.
2. **Acts 5:7-11** – *Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much." 9 Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." 10 Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband.*

NKJV

- C. The story of Ananias and Sapphira is a classic illustration of having the WRONG MOTIVE for giving – or doing any other act of righteousness before others.
1. Their motive was to simply draw attention to themselves – to seek the praise and glory of OTHERS, rather than to glorify GOD.
 2. The fact that they had been blessed by God with the ability to own land in the first place.
 3. But rather than give God the glory for having blessed them with something they could now use to be a blessing to others, they sought all the glory and all the attention for themselves.
 4. And they got their reward.
 - a. Their glory from men was short-lived.
 - b. And their reward was to go down forever in the pages of Scripture at two self-seeking, greedy, covetous, glory-seekers whom God struck dead for their sin.

CONCLUSION

- I. We live in the most prosperous country in the free world.
 - A. We really have it a lot better than perhaps we realize:
 1. Despite the fact that we are facing soaring prices at the gas pump, and for everything else from grocery prices to clothing.

2. And despite the fact that housing prices in other parts of the country are plummeting and people are being forced into foreclosures.
 3. We are still blessed by God far more than we deserve.
- B. Therefore, we have been given a charge to be *"rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share."* **(1 Timothy 6:17-19)**
1. In fact, the teaching of Jesus ASSUMES that you and I as His disciples would be engaged in "charitable deeds."
 - a. **Matthew 5:42** - *"Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away."*
 2. However, in THIS section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes it clear that our giving to others, or any other act of righteousness we do, must ALWAYS be done to glorify GOD rather than ourselves.
- II. How do you glorify God?
- A. The apostle Peter said something about this subject when he wrote to Christians during the first century who were undergoing intense persecution.
 1. **1 Peter 2:11-12** – *Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak*

against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

2. Our lives as Christians are constantly being observed by those around us – and what they see is telling them one of two things.
 - a. Our lives are telling them we are deeply devoted to the Christ Who died for us and want to do everything to please Him, or...
 - b. Our lives are telling them the Christ Who died for us takes a backseat to our own wants and desires, and that our Christianity is only for show.
- B. What does your life tell about your relationship with Jesus Christ?
 1. Does your life bring honor and glory to God and Christ?
 2. If not, you can change that beginning this very day:
 - a. If you've never obeyed the gospel of Christ in the first place...
 - b. Or, if you're life as a Christian hasn't been the kind of example that would glorify God and Jesus, then...