

Matt 6:1-18

Motives Matter More

In chapter five Jesus reveals that real righteousness begins with the attitudes and affections of the heart, teaching His followers to live to a higher standard of righteousness than what they had seen and been taught by the Pharisees.

Last week as we closed out chapter five, Jesus laid out some challenging principles for His followers in how they were to respond toward those who would insult them, take from them, and hurt them.

- **People matter more than our pride:** *It's better to receive than retaliate - give rather than grumble.*
- **People matter more than our possessions:** *It's better to surrender than strive - relinquish than refuse.*
- **People matter more than our pain:** *It's better to love than to loathe - to rise above rather than respond in kind.*
- **People matter to God:** *It's better to be like God than to live like the world!*

In chapter six, Jesus continues to present principles of His Kingdom that ought to govern our lives, but now He deals with the attitude of our hearts concerning some of the most important acts of worship and righteous religious service

1. **Giving**
2. **Praying**
3. **Fasting**

One thing we will see clearly this morning is that to Jesus, our motives matter!

1. Giving

READ: 6:1-4

- It's important to recognize that Jesus assumes that His followers will be engaged in these activities, so rather than issue a command to do these things Jesus teaches us how we ought to do them.

NOTE: I wonder if He would assume the same of His church today? The reality is that when it comes to giving, praying, and fasting the application for some of us is simply this - do it! When you do, here are some principles to guide you.

a) Check your motives: Why do you give? 6:1-2

- Giving to help others is a worthy and noble cause that the followers of Christ ought to be engaged in, but giving can be corrupted by ego. Jesus warns His followers against the kind of giving that is motivated by the recognition of people.

NOTE: This proud pharisaical spirit is still alive, and for some giving is born more from their desire to be praised than a genuine concern to help others or to honor God. Jesus is calling His followers to something better!

- Jesus refers to the Pharisee's who ensured people took notice when they gave as if they sounded a trumpet to announce their apparent acts of generosity. He calls them hypocrites, which is the word for an actor.

APPLICATION: There is no room in the church for such hypocrisy, and if the pursuit of men's praises is the motivation behind your giving you may be praised by men but God knows your heart and you should expect any reward from Him.

NOTE: Acts 5:1-11 offers a difficult but sobering example of just how much God despises this kind of hypocrisy.

Acts 5:1-11

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. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. 6 And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.

7 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. 11 So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

NOTE: This couple pretended to give more than they did so they looked more generous than they were. They gave to receive the praises of men, but lying to the Holy Spirit doesn't get you far with God!

- Jesus connects our reward to the motivation of our heart. If we give to receive the recognition of humans, then we shouldn't expect any reward from heaven! Note

NOTE: Jesus isn't saying that when a person finds out that you have given your heavenly reward is taken away, but that when our giving is motivated by the desire to be seen by others we should not expect a reward from Him.

APPLICATION: While for some believers the application is, "why don't you give?" To others this is a good reminder to be mindful of our motives in giving. Give, but do so to honor God and help others!

NOTE: There may be times when even a careful examination of our motivation leaves us wondering if our heart is right. In those cases, we shouldn't stop giving, but instead we should...

b) Change your methods: How do you give? 6:3-4

- In our giving the best way to ensure that our motive is not defiled by our own ego is to give in such a way that only God knows what we have given!

NOTE: The clear principle here is that we ought to strive to give in such a way that our giving is kept between us and God. While that may today be difficult, limiting those who can praise our gift will help to ensure that we maintain pure motives.

- Though there are other principles laid out in scripture that guide our giving, this one is certainly one that is neglected concerning giving for many Christians today. In fact, many churches promote generosity through shame and praise, and sadly this does help to generate greater income.

APPLICATION: We are very low key in our approach to giving. It's not because we think giving isn't important, it's because we think that what motivates our giving is most important. We don't want to be a church that motivates egotistical or begrudging giving, but we do hope that as you grow in the knowledge of the Lord that giving to help people and to His work would be the natural overflow of your appreciation for God's goodness to you!

2 Cor 9:6-9

6 But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. 9 As it is written:

"He has dispersed abroad,

He has given to the poor;

His righteousness endures forever."

NOTE: I believe that cheerful giving is more a sign of spiritual maturity than material prosperity, and something that I have seen is that the generosity does not often flow from material prosperity but from lives of people who recognize the greatness of their spiritual prosperity!

- If you desire to give to those in need, we do have connections with ministries that are on the front lines of helping those in genuine need. My prayer is that giving would become a part of our DNA as believers.

Acts 20:32

I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

NOTE: If you have never experienced the blessing associated with generous giving, you are missing out!

2. Praying

READ: 6:5-8

a) Check your motives: *Why do you pray?* 6:5-6

- Not only can our pride corrupt our giving, but it can even corrupt our praying!

NOTE: Jesus uses the example of the Pharisee's to illustrate to His followers the kind of prayer they should not be engaged in. For the Pharisee's, and for many Jews their commitment to prayer was related more to ritual than relationship. Being required to pray at least three times daily 9:00am, noon, and 3:00pm the Pharisee's would make a show of these prayer times in the synagogues or on the street corners.

- Again, Jesus ties their motives to their reward. Because they pray to be recognized by people, they have their reward the moment people recognize them.

APPLICATION: Though this may seem strange to us, we should recognize that this attitude remains and even prevails within some church congregations. We need to ensure that we guard against this within our own hearts.

b) Change your methods: *How do you pray?* 6:6-8

➤ **Be alone** 6:6

NOTE: The issue being addressed is not public or corporate prayer, but that which motivates our public prayer.

- Public and corporate prayer is important and even vital for the health of the church, but it is not a substitute for personal private prayer between you and God!

NOTE: Often we have this idea that our prayers are more powerful because of the time, place, or people that we pray with. The reality however is that there is great power in private prayer, the issue is that we tend to undervalue it in the private setting.

APPLICATION: Our private prayer life ought to set the tone for how we pray in public. We can test the motives of our public prayers by considering the consistency of our private prayers. When our public prayer life exceeds the time spent in private prayer, we ought to examine ourselves carefully!

➤ **Be aware 6:7-8**

- Jesus wants His followers to petition their God in a completely different way from the Pharisee's and the Pagans.

NOTE: The Pharisee's prayed openly to be seen by men, the pagans prayed repetitively to be heard by God, but those who pray to their Father do not need to pray like the pagans.

- Within the scripture we often see prayers repeated more than once. Elijah prayed for it to rain seven times in 1 Kings 18, Jesus prayed for another way three times in the garden, and Paul prayed three times for a thorn in his flesh to be taken before the Lord answered that His grace was sufficient for him.

NOTE: The warning isn't against repetitive prayer entirely, but against the use of vain repetitions. This can be defined as any and all prayer that contains words without meaning. This type of praying is popular within many charismatic circles today, where a person is told to repeat a phrase over and over – as if God doesn't hear us the first time! Jesus says it so directly, don't be like them!

- As a young Christian I used to think that I couldn't pray as well as other more seasoned saints, but as I have grown, I have come to understand that eloquence in our prayers does not equate to effectiveness. God is not impressed with big or religious sounding

words, what God sees is the heart, and the most heartfelt prayers are in my estimation the most powerful ones!

NOTE: Do you know God as your Father? Then you have everything you need for powerful effective prayer!

James 5:16-18

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

QUOTE: Pastor David Guzik points out in his commentary on this text that,

The Jewish rabbis of Jesus' day said things like: *"Whoever is long in prayer is heard"* and *"Whenever the righteous make their prayer long, their prayer is heard."* One famous Jewish prayer began like this: *"Blessed, praised, and glorified, exalted, and honored, magnified and lauded be the name of the Holy One."*

APPLICATION: It is easy for us to talk about prayer, but we need to examine both the motives and the method of our prayer life. The important thing about prayer is that we are doing it consistently, honestly, and privately.

- Someone might ask, in what way does God reward us? I believe that the rewards of the Lord are heavenly rewards, but that they are also seen in God's answer to our prayers, His provision for our bodies, and His peace in our hearts and minds, His wisdom in times of trouble, and His leading when the way is unclear.

APPLICATION: If the Lord has revealed any deficiency in your life from what we have been studying, the first step toward finding a remedy is to seek the Lord in prayer!