

Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount is a marvel. It should not surprise us since Jesus is the one who preached it. But we should be careful that we do not overlook it and somehow fail to appreciate that both in content and in structure this sermon is truly profound. We are moving into a new section of the sermon. And so it is a good point at which to spend some time in review.

Overall in the sermon, Jesus is focused on the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven. He wants to clear up misunderstandings and definitively set forth its nature and character. The introduction to the sermon is the beatitudes. Here are these attention-getting and sometimes shocking declarations that a certain kind of person is a truly happy person. Clearly the kind of person that Jesus says is truly happy is not the kind of person the world thinks is truly happy. The kind of person the world thinks is happy is the rich, the confident, the proud, the powerful, and the successful. Jesus, however, says the genuinely happy person is poor, mourns over his sin, is humble, and hungers for righteousness. And as Jesus presents his portrait of the truly happy person, it becomes clear that the reason there is such a difference is because he is looking from the perspective of the kingdom of heaven. He is looking from the perspective of God.

The way the world looks at things is molded and directed by the prince of the power of the air. He has been questioning and challenging the perspective of heaven ever since he entered the serpent and said to Eve, "Has God indeed said." He still speaks and humanity has not learned its lesson from the debacle that occurred in Eden. It still listens to the one who comes only to steal, kill, and destroy.

But Jesus is speaking from the perspective of heaven. The people he says are happy are the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. And they reflect righteous, God-pleasing character. Character matters. It is who we are. Everything comes down to that. What we do is simply a reflection of who

we are. Those who belong to the kingdom reflect kingdom righteousness from the heart.

The next section of the sermon focuses in the difference kingdom righteousness makes in the world. This character is like salt and light. Its distinction from its surroundings enables it to have a positive redemptive impact. Heaven's character lived out in the world preserves, adds taste, and illumines the world. So live it out, says Jesus.

Jesus then turns to address the moral standards of kingdom righteousness. God's law reveals those standards, but the teachers of his law in Judea, the Pharisees and scribes, had mutilated a right understanding of that law. So Jesus proceeded to dismantle the misinformation which had spread among the people. The fundamental problem with the false teachers was that they relaxed it and refashioned it into something attainable. They amputated it from the heart. Jesus says, "No." God's law forbids not only actual murder but also anger. Kingdom righteousness resists not only actual physical adultery but also adulterous lust. It treasures fidelity and behaves with honesty. It does not seek its own even when wronged. In the kingdom of heaven loving your neighbor as yourself means always seeking what is good for others even when they stand opposed to you. These are righteous moral standards of the kingdom. Each of them pertain to living righteously, behaving righteously in the context of other people.

And now in a new section of the sermon, in chapter 6, Jesus turns the examination spotlight onto how kingdom citizens are called to behave in their direct relation to God. This is kingdom righteousness in terms of worshiping God.

After this section Jesus moves to how we are to interact with what we might call the everyday things. It is how we relate to the stuff of this world. Righteousness of the kingdom is also expressed in our attachment to and interaction with worldly treasures, clothing, and health.

So you see these truths about the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven. It starts with character. It impacts the world. It acts rightly in relation to the people of the world. It worships God for God. And it also relates rightly

to the everyday things of this world. This is just an amazing sermon. I thought it well to take you in this little tour because I did not want us to miss the beauty of the whole.

So we turn our focus now to this new section which starts with chapter 6:1.

[Read Text and Pray]

Right here in chapter 6:1, Jesus issues a warning: "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them."

This teaching does not contradict what Jesus had said in chapter 5. Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works. That statement has to do with how you live in relation to other human beings. You can't keep that quiet. You must not hide that under a bushel basket. When you live in the world but not of the world, the world is going to see the difference that God makes in you. You attract them to God. When you love your enemies. When you preserve your marriage. When you watch your mouth and speak good things. When you control your anger and build people up. And when you pursue reconciliation with those whom you have offended. You are exhibiting God to the world. Put that on a lamp stand so people will behold your God.

Now it is quite different here in chapter 6. Jesus has turned the corner from how you operate in relation to others to how you operate as a worshiper of God. Practicing your righteousness in this segment of the sermon applies to how you express your worship and service of God directly to him. That, Jesus says, is not a thing to flaunt before the world. Will the world see your righteousness practiced before them? Sometimes it certainly will. But Jesus says, "do not do it for the purpose of being seen by them." We do not have a contradiction here but a transition.

It becomes clear because Jesus provides three examples of what he is talking about. The three examples are giving alms, praying, and fasting. Here Jesus is setting kingdom citizens apart from hypocrites. Look at verse 2. Thus when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you as the hypocrites do. Then there is verse 5. And when you pray, you must not be

like the hypocrites. They love to be seen by others. Finally, look at verse 16. "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others."

The previous section dealt with obeying God in the context of relationships with all fellow human beings. This section deals with what we could call piety. It is the personal and relational aspect of our interaction with God. It is how we serve him for glory to be received from us and without our being celebrated by others. It is for him between us and him. We offer God sacrifice. We obey his prompting. We cry out to him. We discipline ourselves to say, "I love you this much." If it is done for God, it is not for ourselves.

In recent years, reality TV has become popular. Cameras and microphones are employed to make public what is supposedly done in private for the purpose of entertainment. Do you honestly think that people who know they are on camera act the same as they would if they were unaware that they were being filmed? Well, I know me. And I know that if I knew others were watching, it would effect what I do. And to the extent that my behavior changed because of them, my actions would be for them.

And if I act in a way that is for the sake of appearance, then it is not really me. People can put on a show. A "gazillion" dollar industry is devoted to paying actors and directors to depict characters by pretending to be someone other than themselves. And we know it is not really them and we are okay with that because we know it and we know why they do it. But when we pretend to be someone other than ourselves in real life, it is not so impressive. When authenticity is removed from our relationships they are hollow and carry little meaning.

When it comes to the worship and service of God, pretending decimates any appreciation God might have and any reward he might be inclined to give. Kingdom citizens will understand this and serve God accordingly.

In Genesis 4 we are introduced to the first two children to be born in God's young creation. {Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord." And again

she bore his brother Abel. Abel was a keeper of sheep and Cain a worker of the ground.} This introduction to the two young men prepares us for the big event that happens in their lives. {In the course of time, Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions.} This is what really matters in the course of life, that we bring offerings of worship to God.

{And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was angry and his face fell. The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry and why is your face fallen? If you do well, will not be accepted?"}

As early as Genesis 4, we learn that it is a momentous event in the life of human beings when they approach God with an offering. It is only fitting that we should come before God with a present, an offering. But as surely as we see both Cain and Abel bringing an offering, we are told that the Lord had regard for the offering of Abel but not the offering of Cain. Hebrews says it is because of faith. By faith Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain. God commended him by accepting his gift. Cain shows us something about himself right there in Genesis 4 which reveals something was wrong with his offering. He was expecting approval. We know that because when he found that his offering was unacceptable to God, he became very angry and then he killed Abel. He was a hypocrite. And when his hypocrisy was uncovered, he became angry. He was the first son after all. If anyone's offering should have been acceptable, it should have been his. Cain embodies the spirit of the scribes and Pharisees. Because when Jesus came and exposed their hypocrisy and their sham religion, they reacted to him just as Cain did to Abel.

To present righteous practice to God in a way that honors God and finds acceptance with him is to serve him for him and not for me or for anybody else. Here is a striking difference before the face of God, but many, many make the mistake of thinking they can please God with self-centered acts which are detached from the love of God. Motivated by love of self and hope for reward which congratulates my superior effort, human beings are blind to the perspective of heaven. So Jesus starts this section with the

word Beware. Beware. Look out. Exercise caution. If you mess up in regards to this point, the consequences could be catastrophic.

The Lord spoke to Cain in that way. When Cain saw that the Lord had no regard for him or for his offering, he was very angry and his face fell. And the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door." For you and your offering to be accepted, you can't come to me to prove how good you are. Doing well means coming with a broken and contrite heart. And if you come any other way, look out! Sin is crouching at the door. It is ready to engulf you.

Listen. Everyone, listen. It will never do you any good if you pretend to seek God, if you simply pretend to worship God. It is an abomination to God to pretend to worship him so others will marvel at how pious you are.

Tragic results befell a couple in the early church who made a show of an offering that was meant to impress others rather than God. His name is Ananias and hers is Sapphira. People in the early church were selling their lands and houses and bringing all the proceeds and laying them at the feet of the Apostles. Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property. They brought some of the proceeds of the sale and laid them at the apostles' feet as though it was the entirety. Peter, however, knew they were being deceitful. He asked Ananias, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? . . . You have not lied to man but to God." And immediately Ananias breathed his last. Later Sapphira was came before Peter and not knowing her husband was now dead, she perpetuated the lie. Peter said to her, "how is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?" And she fell down and died as well.

This is a scary thing that happened! Luke tells us that great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard these things. Yes, and great fear still comes upon the church. This event is a graphic display that God does not respond warmly when people make a hypocritical show of serving him. It may look to the world like a display of sacrifice or devotion, but God knows the truth. He knows when people love him, and he knows

when people love getting praise for looking like they love him. And when that is the case, it not only fails to please God, it rightly infuriates him.

So we must beware. We must not practice our righteousness in front of others in order to be seen by them. The reward we seek is the reward we will receive. If you do what you do for the glory of God. God will reward you. But if you do what you do for the praise of men, then what you got is what you get.

So, when you give to the needy as a sacrifice to God, don't blow a trumpet. Don't do it so others will know. Do it so a need will be met and God will be praised.

When you pray, don't stand on the street corner pretending to love God. When you pray, keep it real. You are praying to God. Pray to God. Pray to please God, God alone, and God always.

When you fast, it is for God. And the God who sees you really serving him will reward you. He will give to you the greatest reward ever, himself.

So take a hard look at why you do the things you do. Why do you give generously? Why do you play an instrument or lift your voice the way you do in public worship? Why do you pray the way you do? Why do you have a quiet time? Why do you discipline yourself to forsake sin? Obviously the conclusion is not that we should not do these things. But we should not do them so others will think how great we are. When we do what we do for the praise of God, and everything else takes a back seat, then we show God we really love him.

Conclusion

There is but one who has loved God perfectly in this way. And you know who that is right? Yes, it is Jesus. He did not give to get applause; he did not pray for man's accolades. He did everything he did for the glory not of himself, but of the Father. He glorified the Father by accomplishing the work the Father sent him to do. And the Father rewarded His son. He spoke with the pride of a father to all those who were around at his baptism and at his glorification: this is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased.

And it is a great thing that the Father was pleased with his son. That was necessary if his Son would be able to stand in our place and absorb the punishment due our sin and so that we might stand with him through faith and receive the reward due the righteousness of Jesus.