



### **In the Secret Place**

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I think that if you thought about it for just a moment, we will all agree that we live in an age of marketing and self-promotion. Companies advertise their products. Entertainers have their agents and their publicists. Politicians put themselves forward as leaders of society and as the only ones who can accomplish the good for the people. Employees in companies position themselves for promotions before their bosses. Athletes celebrate their good plays with crazy dances and other antics. Men and women dress in a way to call attention to their appearances. And now on the internet, a popular web site known as youtube.com which broadcasts home videos has the slogan “broadcast yourself”.

In Western society at least, we are completely fascinated with ourselves, with who we are and with what we do and how we think. If someone were to simply step back from it and be able to look at it objectively, they might think that self-promotion was one of the governing laws of the universe without which society would collapse. If you can just somehow make yourself look good either physically or through your reputation, you have the opportunity to get ahead. You just have to distinguish yourself by making what you do or what you say seem more important to others.

I am simply talking in societal terms right now and all of that simply to sensitize you to the spirit of our age. It is so pervasive that without a doubt we just assume that this is just the way things are and may be even that this is just the way things are supposed to be—probably different than even what it was 50 years ago from what our parents and grandparents lived.

For your spiritual sakes, I want you to think about that. For your spiritual sake, I want you to be aware of that self-promoting spirit that is in our society and without doubt has crept into the church at large as well because that is the environment, that is the spiritual atmosphere in which you are trying to live out your devotion to Jesus Christ.

Now, over against that mindset, over against that approach of society stands the sinless Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, during His earthly life in ministry. He was the singularly great Lord of the universe and He lived differently. His whole approach was the exact antithesis to what we live in today. Of Him it is written in Isaiah 53:

*He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him; nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.*

Of the Lord Jesus Christ it can be said in Philippians 2: “He did nothing from selfishness or empty conceit.” And He Himself, speaking from the absolute perfection of truthfulness within His being, says: “I do not receive glory from men” (John 5). “I do not seek my own glory” (John 8).

What a contrast, what a blessed person is the Lord Jesus Christ. How shameful He makes all of the society in which we live look by comparison. This one who alone deserved glory from men, this one alone who was entitled to it, did not seek it. In total self-denial, in a world which He created and had no place to lay His own head, this lovely Lord Jesus Christ glorified His Father while He was here on the earth (John 17:4).

That contrast between the spirit of self-promotion in our world and the spirit of self-denial found in our Lord Jesus Christ is fundamental to understanding the passage that is before us today.

It is a joy to be able to direct your attention back to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6. I invite you to turn there with me. Just very pleased to have the opportunity to bring this to you and to let the Lord through His word speak to your hearts and mold your lives into greater conformity to His blessed image.

Matthew 6. I am going to read the first six verses and then three other verses a little later in the passage to kind of set the context for what we are doing here this morning. Matthew 6, beginning in verse 1 where Jesus says speaking to those who had claimed to be His disciples:

*Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise, you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may be honored by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor; do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret and your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*

*When you pray; you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door, and pray to your father who is in secret and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*

And skip over to verse 16:

*Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do; for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed*

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*by men, but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you (Matthew 6:16-18).*

That's the passage we are going to be looking at today and for a couple of weeks to come I would say. It has been nearly two months since we were last in the Sermon on the Mount and frankly, I missed it just for my own sake. With a lot of new people coming in and with the passage of time, I want to take just a moment to kind of hit the reset button to get the Sermon on the Mount and its structure back in your mind as we move into this important passage that goes to the very core of how you live your life. We need to understand it in its context.

And so with that in mind, flip back for just a moment to Matthew 4:17. I am going to say some things just very briefly that I have said often over the past year or two. In Matthew 4:17, Matthew gives an overview of all that Jesus taught:

*From that time, Jesus began to preach and say: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

Now that the king, the Lord Jesus Christ, was on the scene, the kingdom of heaven was closer to men than it had ever been before because God Himself, heaven itself, was incarnate before them.

Then, just a few short verses later, Matthew introduces this long discourse from Jesus that we call the Sermon on the Mount and look how Jesus opens it in 5:3. He says:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

The phrase, "the kingdom of heaven," links that opening statement in 4:17 with the totality of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus here in the Sermon on the Mount is explaining what repentance looks like in the life of the true believer. This is the fruit of repentance that we see laid out in the Sermon on the Mount. We have it from Jesus' own lips what the repentant life looks like.

For most of you that are in here in GraceLife, you would have a testimony—a Christian testimony that says, "Yes, I have repented of my sin. I have put my faith in Christ for my salvation. I trust Him alone." Well, the Sermon on the Mount spells out for you what life should look like.

As we have studied the Sermon on the Mount for the past several months, we have seen again and again and again that Jesus addresses the matter of what righteousness looks like—what daily righteousness, what the daily fruit of repentance looks like. He is dealing with heart issues. The external aspects of our lives flow out of what is coming out of our hearts. Jesus addresses His teaching to the heart—to the way that we think; and the way we think affects the way that our external life goes.

To repent is to turn fundamentally away from sin and toward God in submission to Him through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The one who says, “I have repented. I have trusted Christ,” is saying, “What Jesus says is law. What Jesus says is authoritative.”

We gladly embrace that. We don’t resist or resent the fact that Christ speaks with authority over our lives—we are glad for it. We are glad to be able to respond in obedience to the one who died for our sins. That’s a pleasure. That’s a grace we enjoy.

Then in the Beatitudes, in Matthew 5:3-12, Jesus has expounded on the true nature of Christian character. That’s all I’m going to say about that. I think there are probably CDs available if you want to explore that more. In those verses, He is expounding on true Christian character.

Then in verses 13-16, He is explaining the relationship of His disciples to the world.

In verses 17-20, Jesus is explaining His own relationship to the law of God. He makes a very important statement in verse 20 that I want to call your attention to again. Look at 5:20 with me where Jesus says:

*I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

There is that surpassing righteousness that is called for. There is this surpassing righteousness that true conversion instills in the character and lives itself out.

In verses 21-48, Jesus illustrates how true righteousness exceeds the Pharisees with six different examples and we have looked at all of those. The law of God regulates the heart, not just external behavior.

And so entrance in the kingdom requires this surpassing righteousness. People that are marked by the hypocrisy that marks the Pharisees are not going to know the blessings of heaven at all. In contrast to the external religion of the Pharisees and in contrast to the external religion of our day, Jesus says that the righteousness that truly belongs to His kingdom must be an inner righteousness—it flows from your heart, it is something that is the matter of personal conviction, personal desires, personal affections. You love this kind of righteousness because it is the expression of the righteousness of the Lord Himself. You love the Lord and you want to be like Him. It is actually very simple in principle.

Now let me clear any confusion on the point. It is not that we obey this law in order to be saved. No one can obey the law in order to be saved. “We all sin and fall short of the glory of God.” You can’t erase your guilt with your own effort through self-improvement. This isn’t about self-improvement. It is not about that at all. It is certainly not about how to achieve your salvation by works. We’ve made that clear over the past couple of years. No, it is based on the righteousness of Christ. It is based on His substitutionary death for our sins that God can declare us righteous and welcome us into

His presence. Christ saves us, but the people that He saves He changes. And the way He changes them is expressed in the Sermon on the Mount.

So when we read the Sermon on the Mount, we have a blessed prescription for what our lives should look like—what we should train our hearts to think and desire and love.

Now, as we move into chapter 6, as I transition into this new material for today, understand this. Jesus is still talking about what true righteousness looks like. He is still talking about what the surpassing righteousness that is the mark of the true kingdom of God. I want you to see the overall structure before we get to single verses.

Here in chapter 6, Jesus is changing the emphasis. He is going from your relationship to the law that we saw throughout chapter 5 (at least verses 21-48), and now He is looking at your acts of devotion—those private acts of expression of righteousness in the presence of God the Father. He is setting forth the motives which should drive you to do them.

It shouldn't surprise us at all that Jesus would start talking about motives to us because the whole teaching that we have had up until now in chapter 5 has been about a righteousness that goes to the heart. And so now we are just seeing that drawn out even more as He talks about what our motives are.

Here is something that we need to think about. If true Christianity really is about having right motives for what you do, we can quickly see something that has an important implication for us—something that you know experientially even if you haven't thought about it this explicitly.

It is entirely possible for you to be doing the right thing and for everything to be all wrong. Right? For you to be doing externally what would seem to be in conformance with the Scriptures, but your heart is all confused, it is all messed up, you are doing it for the wrong reasons, you are doing it with the bad attitude or whatever. Right action, apparent to man, you do it and say, "Oh, that's nice." But you know deep in the recess of your conscience that something is fundamentally wrong with the way that you are approaching spiritual life.

Jesus in His blessed grace to us this morning is going to help us untangle a lot of that. What we have to embrace as we come to this passage is the fact that it is not enough to just do the right thing. The Lord Jesus Christ is after the way we think and our attitudes and the affections that we have.

We could easily go so far as to say that it has to be one of the things that distinguishes true Christianity from any false religion around. You can get into a false religion and go through the rituals and it doesn't matter what you are like inside. For us, we have the blessed privilege of being transformed from the inside out. We embrace that. Look at 6:1 again here. Jesus says:

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*Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them.*

An expression of purpose is what we have here. What is the purpose of practicing your righteousness? Why do you do what you do? Jesus says, watch out, be careful, be on guard here lest you would simply do it to be noticed by men. If you do it to be noticed by men, He says, you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

Now just a quick issue about the text here. Those of you that are using the New King James or perhaps the King James Version may see the word “almsgiving” that is based on a certain number of Greek manuscripts. The older and the better manuscripts read “righteousness” which is the text that we have here. And that’s an important difference because here in 6:1, Jesus is making an overarching, fundamental statement. He is laying down a principle that governs many different aspects of life. And so when He says, “beware of practicing your righteousness before men,” that’s the overarching principle that governs what we see in the first 18 verses of this chapter.

So when He goes on to talk about giving, praying, and fasting, (get this because this is important), He is simply using those three points as illustrations of the greater, broader theme. So don’t think that He is only talking about those three things as you read this passage. He is examining everything that you do as an expression of your devotion to Him. Everything is on the table with this general statement, not simply those three things that He uses to illustrate the big point.

Jesus is going beyond the external righteous acts that you do—the seemingly righteous acts that you do—to talk about your motives in doing them. He says that if you are doing the right things in an effort to gain the applause of men, you are a hypocrite. He says that kind of devotion is not acceptable to God the Father. You pollute the righteous things that you do externally with the heart attitude that you bring to them if you are not careful.

That’s why He says, beware, be careful, watch out for this very real threat to your spiritual life. It is not Christian living to live for the applause of men and it does not bring the blessing of God on your life.

You know that experientially and you know it intuitively because your conscience condemns you when you are doing those things with an eye toward having men notice you and applaud you for what you do.

The basic thing that Jesus is saying here is that you must live your life seeking the approval of God, not the men around you. That is transforming. That is liberating. We will talk about it next week, but think about it.

Why do you even care what people think? Their breath is in their nostrils. They are going to die and stand before God themselves. Getting their approval is meaningless compared to living for the blessing of God. So where this leads us is that as we recognize our spiritual duty from the Scriptures, we see that we want to seek the pleasure of God,

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the blessing of God, the approval of God, and whether men notice our good deeds or not is something that borders on irrelevance.

And so Jesus here on the Sermon on the Mount comes to you in the midst of everything that you do in the name of Christ and says, who are you trying to impress? Are you trying to impress the people who see you or are you seeking the smile of God? And the beauty of it, the glory of it is that on His infallible, impeccable word He says: God will greatly reward you when you seek His praise and His approval regardless of whether you gain the praise of men. It is all about what your highest heart aspiration is.

Now what follows in the rest of this passage from verse 1 is absolutely brilliant, which you would expect from the genius mind of an omniscient God. Jesus starts to unpack this principle and He tells us what not to do and what to do in order to protect ourselves from being a man-pleaser. He lays out in this passage ahead of us how to mortify and kill that desire to have men praise you as you do your deeds of righteousness. It is very practical instruction. You do them in a way that hides them from the sight of men even though you are doing them. You do them in a way that it is only evident in the eyes of the omniscient God. If men happen to see, okay, but that's not your goal, that's not your aim, that's not your desire.

So there are two points that I want to leave you with. And basically what I have done today, is to lay out the issue for you this morning to kind of introduce the text to you. Rather than rush through it, I want to give you the opportunity in the coming week to just kind of think about these things and then when we come back together after you had some fruitful self-examination in your own lives, we are going to be in a position to have the Lord really encourage us with what He says during this passage. So point #1. What is Jesus is saying here?

## **1. Check Your Motives**

Check your motives as you live the Christian life. He says, “Beware of practicing your righteousness.” It means that you turn your attention to this issue. He says, think about this with an air of caution. It is as though you are walking near the edge of the cliff that would plunge you to your death as you stepped over the line and He says, beware, there is danger here.

Take note of this if you are one of my disciples. Take note of this in your pursuit of me so that you can avoid this danger and know instead the blessing of God. Watch your heart as you practice your righteousness. Watch your heart as you practice piety – those deeds that express your devotion to Christ. Check your motives as you live out your spiritual life so that you have a clear idea of who it is that you are trying to please.

And He says (look at the text with me again) – Matthew 6:1:

*Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them.*

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It is not that it is wrong to practice your righteousness. Of course that would be silly to say something like that. No, the issue here is why you do it before men to be noticed by them. That word “to be noticed” is the word that we get our English word theater from. He says, what are the motives of your heart as you do these deeds of righteousness. And this is the theme throughout the Scripture. Look at 6:2 again: Beware of giving to the poor so that you may be honored by men. The hypocrites do it so they may be honored by men. There is that man-pleasing attitude that He calls attention to.

In verse 5 He says:

*The hypocrites love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners that they may be seen by men.*

Verse 16:

*When the hypocrites fast, they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting.*

See the common theme here running throughout this? Four different times Jesus has emphasized a warning against doing something in order to be honored by men.

Notice how—just think about this beloved, just how sick this is. That’s right, I use the word “sick” to describe this. To put a mask on your face as it were saying, “I am seeking to please God here with my prayers and with my giving and with my fasting” and you are actually doing it in order to be seen by men. That was what the Pharisees were doing. It was all a mask, it was all a theater, it was all a show to make other people think that they were something inside that they really were not. They didn’t care about pleasing God. They wanted men to applaud them.

So Jesus is not criticizing giving or praying or fasting. What He is criticizing is using those acts to get the praise of men. Why you are putting on this act as though you are really seeking to please God?

Hear me, beloved. The reason that you do something has great significance in the eyes of God. He looks straight past all the external appearances that we can only see in each other, He looks straight past all of that and looks straight at your heart and says, “Why are you doing that?”

Now that just spiritually undresses us, doesn’t it? This just lays us all open and bare before the one with whom we have to do. He looks on their heart and He calls them hypocrites, stage actors, someone who is hiding his true identity, someone who is playing make believe, putting on a display for his chosen audience so that they will congratulate him on his deeds of righteousness. Jesus says, “It is all unacceptable.” There is no reward from God for that.



You as my beloved disciples, He says, be on guard. Don't fall into this pit. Check your motives.

## 2. Choose Your Reward

Basically you have two choices that Jesus lays out here. He says you can choose the applause of men or you can choose the approval of God. You can't have it both ways.

### a. The Applause of Men

Again, we are still introducing the passage. Look at what He says here. The applause of men in verse 2, He says, when the hypocrites sound the trumpet, when they give to the poor – look at what He says at the end of verse 2 – He says,

*Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.*

In verse 5, when they pray in the synagogues to be seen by men, He says,

*Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.*

And in verse 16, when they fast and neglect their appearance to be noticed by men, He says at the end of verse 16,

*Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.*

That phrase, “they have their reward in full” is fascinating. Fascinating phrase in the Greek language as it was used at the time of Christ. This is a technical expression that was used in business contexts and was used to draw up the receipt marked, “paid in full.” You would hand the receipt to somebody to show that the transaction was completed.

When Jesus says, these hypocrites have received their reward in full, it is though they had already been given a receipt and they have absolutely no further claim to reward for what they have done. Jesus says, it is the praise of men that you sought; it is the praise of men that you get. The transaction is over. When you do it to be noticed by men and they notice, you have what you were after. You have your reward in full, that's as good as its going to get.

Beloved, (and I'm seeking your best interest as I preach here), get it really clear in your mind that the applause of men is going to seem awfully empty when you stand before Christ and He hands out rewards and in essence tells you, “you already got yours.” In the presence of Shekinah Glory, you are going to see that you traded it for a couple of empty claps of the hand from people that don't even care about you. What is the sense in that? Hold that up in your mind and condemn it and say, “This isn't even in my best interest, let alone dishonoring to God.”

Sometimes I call this the Erv Jezek rule. How many of you know Erv Jezek?

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That's a joke. If any of you had held up your hand, I would have fallen over dead from shock. Twenty years ago or so, Erv Jezek was a client of mine in the law practice. That's why I didn't think you would know him. If he gets a hold of this tape, that'd be the providence of God. That would be awesome.

Erv Jezek was a crusty guy, impossible to please. But I had to work for him and I had to handle his cases and try to make him happy with what I did. He'd answer the phone "Jezek." Real inviting guy to talk to, you know!

I used to just spend hours worrying about how I was going to make Erv Jezek happy. It was just a predominant thing because he was an important client to me at the time.

You know what? Five years later, I had no idea where he was. He wasn't anywhere to be found. I haven't seen or heard of him for 15 years and yet I wasted so much time and energy trying to get his approval.

Beloved, that's a business example. But it's the same way in your spiritual life. Understand this. The people that you are trying to please and impress, probably most of them aren't even going to be around in five years. Their approval is just meaningless in the big scheme of things.

What you need to train your heart to do is to say, "I want the approval of God and if men don't clap for me along the way, I'm utterly indifferent to that because I'm living for an unseen kingdom. I'm living according to and seeking a secret reward that God Himself will give me, a reward that will never fail, that will never fade away. That's what I'm living for. You say that men aren't going to notice me in the process? I don't care. Really, I just don't care."

That's what you have got to say to yourself and be really firm with your heart until you embrace that and say, "Yes, of course." Because the real danger is that you go and you start making important life decisions (I used to talk to seminary students about this), you go and make important life decisions about what you are going to do and it is all governed by the fear of men and just seeking the approval of people that are around you. What a tragedy. What a waste. There is no reward from God for that kind of man-seeking. And you end up doing things that you don't even care about to please people that won't even be there five years from now.

Think about what you are doing and be very careful about who you let influence what you do. Because ultimately you are living lives and I'm preaching to an audience of one. If I please God, it doesn't matter what you think—right? If you please God in your life, it doesn't matter what I think. That's not to eliminate mutual accountability as we live together and all of that. But I'm talking about your heart motives that you have examine and be so clear about.

To take it down from the macro level to a minor level, here is a quick check to understand what our Lord is talking about—one that will make you smile rather quickly. Most of you, if not all of you, pray at one time or another. And many of you have the opportunity to pray in front of other people as well as praying alone.

Let me ask you a question that goes to the heart of this matter. How much more eloquent are your prayers when other people are listening? Why is it (and I've been guilty of this too), why is it that we can set off the spiritual fireworks when there is a group of people gathered around and we are called upon to pray and you don't pray the same way when you are alone before God? Why is that?

Man! This gets personal in a hurry, doesn't it? We have to deal with our hearts honestly to the extent that we see that kind of stuff and you got to say, "You know what? I've got to change here. God, I want to change. I want to pray better in secret. I want to pray more passionately, more eloquently in private than I do in public because God, I want it to be unto your eyes not to the eyes of men."

So while you could seek the applause of men with your religious devotion, it is an empty, dead-end road. It just runs off the cliff. I would encourage you not to do that.

### **b. The Approval of God**

I would encourage you to orient your heart to the other reward that you can choose. It is a violently counter-cultural reward to seek in our day and age. But if you live with an eye toward God and you do things to please Him rather than putting on an outward show to gain the applause of men, you can choose this reward. It is the approval of God—the approval of the creator of the universe, the creator of your breath, the one who gave you life, the approval of the one who hung on the cross to redeem your soul, the approval of the eternal, unchanging God. That's the approval that you can find and know.

Jesus promises it in this passage. Look at Matthew 6:4. He sets forth this contrast very compellingly—God or men.

*Give in such a way that your giving will be in secret and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*

"Wow! I can do things that please you and that you will recompense in one way or another to me? You will reward me even if no one else sees it? When I'm down on my knees and I'm praying to you and I'm pouring my heart out to you, you value that so much that you will reward me even if no one knows?"

Jesus says that's exactly right—in secret and your Father will reward you. Look at the end of verse 6 as He talks about prayer:

*Pray to your Father who is in secret and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*

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Verse 18:

*Do your fasting so it will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*

We will explore this idea of rewards more closely next week, but for today, here is what I want you to focus your attention on. We are just summing up everything that we talked about today.

For you as a disciple of Jesus Christ, part of bringing forth fruit in keeping with your true repentance is that you set aside as a fundamental tenet of your heart, you set aside doing what you do for the sake of gaining the notice and approval of men, particularly as it pertains to your private devotion toward God.

By contrast, you do it for His approval. Whether men notice or approve is incidental, it is secondary, it does not affect what you do. It does not change your joy as you do it.

It is not that we don't do anything in front of men. If that was the case, we would never preach. I have to preach in front of men because I don't like the way I look in the mirror, you know. It is not about what you do, but why you do it. If you are in public ministry, if you are leading different things, that's great—that's what God has called you to do. What Jesus is saying here is guard your heart as you do it so that your eyes are always singularly focused on His approval.

This whole idea of being able to have the approval of God in the midst of the privacy of your life, for some of you beloved, can be a great encouragement. Please hear me on this.

For those of you that are faithful in your service, but you feel overlooked; for the stay-at-home mom who is consumed with the routine duties of keeping house and raising kids; for the lonely widow, confined at home wondering why God still leaves her with so much time on her hands—what I want to say to you is this:

Look to this passage and find your encouragement. The things that you do outside the notice of men are carefully noted by God. As you are faithful in those little tasks—seemingly little tasks—as you pray with no one calling day after day and your mind is just focused on God, you can take heart knowing that those simple things that you do for His approval are things that He notices. He is storing up great reward that will be according to the magnificence of His grace that He showers upon you—even if you do earn the praise and attention of people in your spiritual circles.

This is great. “Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Take it to the bank! Jesus does not lie. He will reward you. Store that up and treasure it in your heart. “God, here I am. No one sees this, but I know you do and I bless your name and I offer these

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things that I do as a sacrifice to you.” God says, “I see that. My blessed child, I am going to reward that. Just wait. Just be faithful and you will see.”

Great encouragement.

The contrast, the warning of this passage speaks to others of us. For some of you (hear me on this), you probably need to stop worrying about making sure that men see you and know how important your work or ministry is. These calculated things that you just drop into a conversation, “Oh, you are doing that—Wow!” You just stop it and start doing things for the approval of God rather than calculating how you can impress men with your latest spiritual exploits. Please, just stop it. That is not the Christian life.

Beloved, I understand we are all convicted by this in one way or another. It is the nature of Jesus’ words here on the Sermon on the Mount. He probes our hearts, He pokes and He prods until He hits something. When it convicts, let Him do His work. Let the scalpel cut. Let Him do it so that His work can change you.

Understand we are not talking about external conduct. I’m not telling you to do better or try harder. That’s not what I’m thinking at all. What we are talking about, what Jesus is talking about here is a heart transformation and purified motives. When that is straightened out in your heart, the other external stuff would take care of itself.

In the midst of the conviction that we all feel in words like this, take heart in the promise that He makes. As you concentrate your spiritual life away from the applause of men and toward the approval of God, know for a fact that our gracious God sees that. He approves of that and the blessing and the love that He intends to pour out upon you for that is far greater than anything that your best acts could ever deserve. He is a gracious God and He will reward you.

Blessing now and blessing in heaven. Greater intimacy, greater assurance, greater power with God and then a more abundant reward when we see Christ face to face. That’s what you have got to focus your heart on. Focus your heart on His approval and let the applause of men come and go as it may.

Let’s pray.

*Our Father, we are challenged by all of these things. We commit our hearts to you, seeking your blessing, your approval more than the applause of men. Give us grace to that end. Encourage us with the promise of reward. Motivate us, Father, with the warning that Jesus gives to beware, to watch out.*

*Father, may our hearts be so oriented toward loving you and pleasing you that we don’t have time to think about how men are receiving it. Lord, we want to be pure, devoted vessels of yours. Give us grace to that end and change our hearts. Check our motives, oh God, until you have made us into what you created us to be.*

“In the Secret Place”

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*In Jesus' name, Amen.*

*This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.*