



## **Righteous Giving**

Matthew 6:2-4

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In the simplest things of day-to-day life, this theme of pleasing God not men is the theme of the next 18 verses, which Jesus illustrates through His teaching on giving to the poor, prayer and fasting. And what we are going to look at this morning is what He has to say about righteous giving.

Kent Hughes makes a very insightful statement in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, which I would commend to you highly – it is very valuable. He says this:

*I wonder what would happen to our great national charities if there were no celebrity benefits or published subscriber lists or bronze plaques or rooms to be named for major donors or pictures to be taken with crippled children. The same question can be asked of the church with much the same result. Giving so that others will think we are good and generous is hypocrisy.*

Very convicting words. If you have gone to hospitals and seen the walls where they have the small plaques and the medium-size plaques and the great big plaques, you know exactly what he is talking about – where the names of donors are recorded for everyone to see. Jesus says to you as a believer in Christ, “Not so, not like that with you – that is not the reason that you give.”

Just to kind of set the right context, let’s not get confused about the priority of giving in the Christian life. The Bible places a priority for Christians to give to the legitimate needs of others, for Christians to support the work of the church. We don’t give so that others can squander it, of course. But in the face of legitimate needs, the heart desire, the heart response, of the Christian is, “Of course, I want to give” – some from limited resources, some from an abundance that God has given to them. But the heart response of the Christian is, “Yes, I want to give.”

Proverbs 19:17 says:

*One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his good deed.*

In 1 Corinthians 16:2 it says:

*On the first day of every week, each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I – meaning Paul – come.*

2 Corinthians 9:7:

*Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

One more verse – 1 Timothy 6:18, where Paul tells Timothy:

*Instruct them – the rich – to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.*

This permeates the Bible – we are only looking at an isolated handful of passages. The idea is that a Christian, a true Christian, will be involved in regular, cheerful, generous giving in accordance with his means or her means. And if you think about it, beloved, it would have to be that way. Perhaps the most famous verse in the Bible emphasizes the giving of God in John 3:16:

*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life.*

You are here, if you are believer in Christ, because God first gave to you. And that fundamental principle – that fundamental premise of the generosity of God in salvation – becomes a fundamental guiding post for you in the way that you live your life. So in response to a giving God, the disciples of Jesus Christ, the true Christians, give both to His church and to the needy around them. Jesus is assuming that here in chapter 6.

Now with that in mind, perhaps the first question that I should ask you, and I say it with a smile on my face (laughter) – there are some people that just naturally smile when they preach; I'm not one of them; I have to write it in my notes: "Smile here" – out of the pastor's love for his people, the first question that I need to ask you here is this: Do you give?

It is well-known that many professing Christians give zero to their churches, to any kind of charity, and beloved, that's contrary to the clear teaching of the scriptures. That is just absolutely contrary to what Christ says we should be like. It is contrary to the very Spirit of Christ Himself, who gave His life on our behalf as a ransom that you might be saved.

Now beloved, as you say, "I received Christ, I love Christ, I am thankful for His gift of salvation" – the only way that you can respond to that is to say, "That means that it has implications for me; that means I need to be generous in giving too." That is the only conclusion that you can come to.

And so we might wonder aloud without actually answering the question – we could ask it rhetorically: What would your checkbook say if it had lips to speak? It is an important question, and perhaps some of you need to start with actually giving to begin your obedience to what the Bible says about the totality of Christian giving, Christian generosity.

And beloved, even a little bit would be a step in the right direction if you are one of those that have not given. I have nothing to gain from saying that, so it is not that I have any personal stake in the matter. It is all about what God requires of those that would name the name of Christ.

With that little bit of introduction, when Jesus teaches here in Matthew chapter 6, these first four verses, He is assuming everything that I just said. He is assuming that His true disciples will be givers. And what He is doing here in these first four verses is He is saying, “Go beyond mere giving to make sure that you are giving for the right reason.” Look at verses 2-4 with me, and this will be our text for this morning. Make sure that you are giving for the right reason. Look at verse 2, where Jesus says:

*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.*

Jesus is going beyond the external act of giving and is telling you to examine your motives in giving – that is the great theme of these first 18 verses.

### ***1. Check Your Motives***

We said last time that one of the key themes through these first 18 verses is to check your motives because God examines your heart motives as you do deeds of righteousness. And Jesus says here in verses 1 and 2, “Beware of doing that righteousness in order to be noticed by men.” He says if that’s what is motivating your giving, you have no reward with God whatsoever.

If you think about a well of water that has poison poured into it – all of the water that comes out of that well is polluted and unfit to drink. And beloved, what Jesus is saying here is that when your externally righteous deeds are motivated by the desire to gain the approval of men, to have them notice, to have them applaud you – your actions, those seemingly righteous deeds, are polluted and unfit for God’s reward – it is poisonous. The heart motives that you bring to the task determine whether God will reward you or not.

And what that means for you is this. Because God places a significance on your motives, you have to choose your reward. You have to decide whose approval it is that you want.

## 2. *Choose Your Reward*

### A. *The applause of men*

You can choose the applause of men; you can choose to be noticed by them in what you do – it is not just about giving, it is the totality of your life. He says you can choose that, but if you do it for that reason and they notice you, you have your reward in full. You have what you were after, you have no claim on anything else – there is nothing more to come.

Think about this, beloved, because He is going to the very heart of what you do and why you do it, and He is saying this determines the kind of reward that you get from God, so we need to take this really seriously, not to please men but to please God.

Because when you do those righteous things and you are calculating in the back of your mind, “Who is going to see this? What are they going to think? They are going to be impressed when they see me do this or that” – beloved, you have forfeited any reward from God for whatever you are doing. Nothing more to come – think about it this way: you have sold out any blessing from God for the cheap, temporary, passing praise of men. That doesn’t even make sense – why would you do that?

And that is why Jesus says, “Be on guard.” God won’t share His glory with someone else. If you want the approval of God, if you want the praise of God, then that has to be the aim. If you are aiming to please men and get some pats on the back, then you might just think about turning off the spigot of God’s reward for what you are doing – that’s what Jesus is saying.

### B. *The approval of God*

But by contrast, Jesus says that you can seek the approval of God as you choose your reward. Look at the end of verse 4 with me, and we will come back to this in a minute, but He says, “Do your giving in secret...”

*And your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”*

End of verse 6:

*Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*

Verse 18:

*Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*

As an aside here, notice this point, that would radically change the way most of us would live if we took it more seriously than what we do and it is a simple theological point: Jesus’ entire argument in this passage presupposes the omnipresence and the omniscience

of God. God is everywhere present so He sees everything that you do. God knows all things, including the inner workings, the inner recesses, of your heart; and so He knows why you do what you do.

Everything is laid open and bare before Him with whom we have to do. When the psalmist in Psalm 23 said, “Thou art with me,” he understood that God saw everything about his life.

Now for those humble believers that are faithful and are seeking to serve Christ, that’s an enormous encouragement because, you know what, if you are being overlooked by men, it is absolutely irrelevant to you – “God sees, God knows, God knows my heart in this, I trust Him, and that’s all I care about.”

For the man-pleaser, for the calculating one, it has a different effect – a sobering effect, a cautioning effect. And the omniscience and the omnipresence of God qualifies Him to be the Judge of your entire life in the way that no one else possibly could be – He knows it all. Everything you do, everything you think 24-7, is in the presence of this all-knowing, all-seeing God. We need to take that seriously.

And that’s what Jesus is saying here in Matthew chapter 6. He says God sees in secret; God knows why you do what you do. Don’t be deluded, Jesus says, into thinking that you can put on this mask of hypocrisy and that the same thing that fools men is also going to fool an omniscient God. He says just throw that out; don’t even let that enter into your thinking.

And keeping within the context of Matthew 6 here, beloved, understand what Jesus is really driving at. What He is really driving at here is the root sin issue of pride. It is the nature of sinful pride in your heart that makes you want to have men think well of you. That’s why some people are so quick to defend themselves when they are offended – “Hey, don’t you know who I am?” Others sulk when they are overlooked. Pride is the reason that men retaliate if they are insulted. It is injured pride; it is all the ugly effects of pride that motivate that kind of response to life.

And here in Matthew 6, what you see is that the desire for the praise of men flows from the same polluted stream, it is that desire for the good estimation in the eyes of others that feeds our sinful pride. And Jesus says here, that pride in your heart has to be put to death, you have to kill it. And in His wonderful grace, and in His brilliant teaching, the genius of His mind, He gives us the means by which to do that; He shows us exactly how to do that.

What we are going to do now is to contrast the wrong and the right way to give. We are just going to look at a simple contrast today, the wrong and the right way to give, with the goal that you would live your life in such a way that an omniscient God would see you and bless you for your obedience to Him. This is designed for your blessing. Yes, it may convict in the process, but if God convicts us on this point, it is simply so that we could repent and live a more righteous life and know the breadth and depth of His blessing.

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## 1. The Wrong Way to Give

So let's look at the wrong way to give, that Jesus lays out for us first. Look at verse 2 with me again; He says:

*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.*

What is the wrong way to give? I will put it simply: The wrong way to give is to do it with an eye toward the response of the men around you, the people around you. To have that animate your thinking and motivate your giving is to look at that and say, "What are men going to think when I do this? How can I call attention to the fact that I am doing this?" Jesus says that's the wrong way, it has no reward.

And when He says here, "When you give to the poor..." He is just talking broadly about a deed of mercy. The idea of "mercy" is bound up in what is said here, the deed of mercy to the poor – you give to them to meet a need of some kind; that's what we have in mind here. And Jesus says when you do this, not if – He assumes that you are going to be generous and gracious in giving like that. He says when you do that, don't sound the trumpet before you like the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets.

What does it mean to sound this trumpet? There is no real agreement among the commentators that you could read. Some people think the statement is simply metaphorical, like we would say, "He sure likes to blow his own horn." And so the idea would be that it is just the general metaphorical way of calling attention to yourself.

Other people think that this refers to the blowing of trumpet to call worshipers to the temple at which time people would also give; I tend toward that understanding of this passage. To some people this might seem a little bit more unlikely, but there are good men that hold this view.

Still others think that Jesus was referring to the sound of coins when they would fall into the trumpet-shaped receptacles that were used to receive the contributions of temple worshipers. So if you threw it in just right, it would really clang and make a lot of noise and call attention. People would look over and say, "Oh, look who just gave," and that would be called sounding the trumpet.

Whatever the actual historical thing that Jesus was doing here is, the point is clear enough. Jesus is condemning – get this – *Jesus is condemning the self-promotion that was at the heart of their giving*. These people were going out of their way to call the attention of other men to the fact that they were being generous, for their supposed generosity. He goes on to say, don't be like them, here is what they do – look at the middle of verse 2 – they do all of that so they may be honored by men.

Some writers have said it well, they said when people give like that, they are really not giving at all. What they are doing is buying; they are using their giving to purchase the praise and plaudits of the men around them. And Jesus says to you as one of His disciples – He says don't be like that; beware, be on guard, because the remnants of sin in your heart will prompt you in this direction. And so you have to stand guard against your heart so that it doesn't carry you away that way. It is amazing how subtle this can be and how many different manifestations of this can take.

I remember years ago, being in another church far from here where some guy was doing a seminar on giving and he said something like this – I am paraphrasing loosely, because it was a long time ago – but what you took away from his message was: “You know, I just thank God for the joy and the blessing that He has given to me since my wife and I started giving over and above our 10% tithe.” You get it? Get it? (Laughter) Just going on, cloaked in words of praise to God, is what he really wanted you to hear: “We're very generous in our giving.”

That smells, you know (laughter), because I don't see how a teacher can talk about the way he gives and go on at length about it like that – I don't see how teachers can say, “I fast twice a week” – I have heard and so have you, we have heard, prominent men who talk about that – I don't see how they can do that consistently with this passage and make that a prominent part of their image.

In this area of giving, beloved, as well as in many other areas of life, you need to draw your mind back to this verse – I want you to write this down and look it up later – Isaiah 2:22, the same spirit that Jesus is teaching on even though He is not directly alluding to it here. The verse says:

*Stop regarding man, whose breath of life is in his nostrils, for why should he be esteemed?*

Why should you seek the approval of men, especially when Jesus says you forfeit the reward of God in doing it? And so Jesus lays all of this out; He says, “Don't do this, be aware of this danger, recognize what is going on, check your motives, and flee from that kind of approach to life.”

Now beloved, I will leave to the work of the Spirit of God to convict your own hearts on where you need to address that. But when the words of Jesus convict us and we say, “Oh, that hurts; that's too much like me; I see myself in this passage” – understand that Jesus doesn't just stop there bringing conviction to your heart, He shows us here how to change and how to give in a way that genuinely pleases the Father. Jesus lays before you here a prescription for conduct, a prescription for your heart motives that guarantees the reward and blessing of God on your life. I want to know what that's like; I trust that you do too.

## 2. The Right Way to Give

So we come to the second point here and the way that Jesus describes the right way to give. The wrong way is to do it with an eye toward men; the right way is to do it secretly with an eye toward God. Look at verses 3-4 with me. Jesus says “But...” – by way of contrast. Instead of doing it for the applause of men, instead of doing it in order to be honored by men, He says do something different. Here is the contrast – when you, believer in Christ, when you, disciple of the living Lord:

*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.*

He says do it in secret, and in a sense, hide it. Hide it from men if you feel yourself tempted toward wanting to win their approval and their applause. He is speaking of secret giving. He says, “Give in a way that does not call attention to yourself before men.” And then, and here is the subtle part, then He says the meaning of this is, go a step further – “Don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” What He is saying there is, “Don’t even congratulate yourself on what you have done.”

And that is where it gets more to heart change, beloved. He is assuming that you have done this in a way that does not call undue attention to yourself. But then He goes on and He says don’t rehearse it to yourself; don’t keep mental records of your good deeds. Forget your so-called goodness; in the end, you have at best only done what you ought to have done.

And so the one who truly gives in accordance to what Jesus says here gives and forgets about it. He does not sit back and say, “Ah, that was good! You know, I really gave there and you know, self, it wasn’t just that you gave – that was good enough, but boy, you hid it from men, you didn’t let anyone know about that.” And you throw your arm out, doing the pat-on-the-back thing. Jesus says – and He is going to the way that you think and reason within your heart – He says, “Don’t even let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.”

You say, “How can I do that? How can I manage my heart like that?” Well, it all goes to how you think, obviously. And let me say this: what you have to do is that you have to draw your thinking to the person of Christ – follow me on this – step back, and – let’s do it this way: think for a moment about something good that you have done recently. Just think about that for the sake of following my point here.

And then alongside that – this is the way that you have to deal with yourself – alongside that, start thinking about how Jesus Christ left the glories of heaven in order to come and die on a wooden cross to pay for your sins. Think about His goodness and His love as He took that punishment in His body on the cross. Think about the goodness of Christ and how He forgives your sins when you repent and put your faith in Christ, that moment when you were truly justified and the weight on your conscience was relieved. You



knew that your guilt was removed, and you truly received a new life and the flames of hell will never going to be a threat to you again.

Think about even now as you live the Christian life. Think of His goodness in how He forgives you and receives you as you confess your sins, instead of turning you away because He has heard the same confession a thousand times before – and just that continual grace and goodness and mercy that He shows to you in your spiritual life when even now you are not worthy of Him.

And you say, “You know, His blood cleanses me from all sins. His righteousness is my standing before God. It was all of His grace, all of His mercy, and how good He is to me and ten thousand other blessings that I haven’t even begun to contemplate in my mind.”

Beloved, when your thinking is focused on the goodness of Christ that way – the surpassing eternal goodness of Christ to you – then when you say, “I gave 50 bucks to that guy,” all of a sudden, you don’t want to go there. You will say, “No, the good one here is Christ – the great deed, the good deed, the marvelous love, the marvelous generosity all belong to Christ. I wouldn’t begin to put my petty little deeds of flipping a \$20 bill to a beggar on the street in comparison to that kind of great goodness.”

And all of a sudden, your mind doesn’t even want to talk about what you did, good or bad. You are so consumed with the goodness of Christ that your mind just stays there. And you see so plainly, when you think clearly about the goodness of Christ, that your goodness and my goodness are not worthy to be compared with His incarnate deity and the goodness that He has shown on our lives.

And that’s how you mortify your pride, that’s how you kill it. You say, “I’m going to give in a way that doesn’t call attention to myself and then when it’s done. I’m going to be so preoccupied with the glory of Christ in my life that I’m not even going to have time to think about what I did. I don’t want to think about that because there is something better and more glorious for my mind to fix on – the glory of Christ, the goodness and love of Christ, so that my left hand doesn’t even care what my right hand is doing.”

And beloved, that kind of giving leads you to the humble spirit that is expressed in Luke 17:10, where they said:

*We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.*

“Jesus, even at my best, even in my absolute best, Your glory and Your goodness surpasses mine; I am unworthy by comparison.” So what you do, beloved, is you give it, you hide it, and you move on. You don’t congratulate even yourself on your own goodness. You are so opposed to the applause of men that you don’t even want your own applause. Jesus says when you approach it that way, your giving will be in secret.

And here is the point, beloved – remember I said that the whole issue here that Jesus was fighting was the issue of the indwelling pride, the sin of pride, that kind of secret giving

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where men don't know what you are doing, and you are not thinking about what you are doing because you are so consumed with Christ – *that kind of secret giving cannot feed your pride*. And when you are intentional and when you approach your life that way, you are giving that way, what you are doing is you are declaring war on indwelling sin and pride. You say, “I know that monster is there, but I'm not going to feed him; I'm going to starve him. I'm not going to give him what he needs to be animated.”

And so when you take pains to keep your good deeds private, it ensures that your giving is not done for the praise of those around you, and that helps put to death that love of pride that the praise of men feeds. The outworking of this can be as simple as this little story:

I remember it wasn't that long ago, a man came to me concerned about a mutual friend that we had who was lacking the means to support his family. This man handed me a large amount of cash – not a check, *cash* that couldn't be traced – and said, “Could you just pass that along anonymously to this person, this family in need? Just pass it along; I don't want them to know where it came from.”

That's glorious generosity; that's a glorious example of what Jesus is talking about here – no show in that at all. Because he could have just as easily gone to the guy and pulled the money out of his wallet and said, “Here you go,” and give the big arm thing, give the big ostentation that said, “Here it is; God bless you, brother; I'm praying for you.” Now with that kind of giving, no one knows – he was giving with an eye toward One, the Father who saw in secret.

What is the result of that kind of giving? What is the result of approaching it? Look at this verse and be greatly encouraged and motivated in this direction. Look at the end of verse 4, where Jesus says, when you give that way, when you give in secret – He says: “Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” Your Father, this One who loves you, this intimate One, will reward you.

Now, some people have fussed over whether a Christian should be motivated by an expectation of receiving a reward from God. They worry over that question and say, “Well, it's better to just do it for the sake of the deed.” I don't believe that at all. If Jesus promises a reward and tells us to look for it, then I am going to look for it, I want the reward of God, don't you? I mean I don't want to live life and give, and think that God was indifferent to it.

No, this motivates holy Christian living. God sees, God knows, God will reward, and God will bless. And so you aim your life after that. If Jesus promises the reward, *He* is the one who brought this into the discussion, not me. *He* is the one who talked about reward first, so I am going to follow His lead – and that's a silly discussion to have.

But notice this: notice that Jesus does not discuss *when* the reward will be given. The best thing that I think to understand here is that there will be rewards for you even in this life. As you grow spiritually, as you know the joy of obedience, as you see the

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providential hand of God blessing your life, you have greater intimacy with this loving Father, but also somehow, the reward will be measured out in eternity as well – Jesus just does not expand on it here. But beloved, here is where I want you to come on this particular point, thinking about the reward: Jesus does not go into a lot of details, and I am not going to speculate as if somehow His teaching was inadequate and He did not say enough.

What you need to see here is that you can trust the Father to do exceedingly beyond anything that you could ask or think in terms of reward for your faithfulness. When you focus on His reward, then the approval of men is just irrelevant, and you just trust God that He will absolutely overwhelm you with the reward – not because you deserve it, but because that is the nature of His gracious heart.

He always gives out of His abundant grace and inexhaustible mercy so much so that even the smallest act of service does not escape His notice. In Matthew 10:42, Jesus said:

*Whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward.*

So beloved, forget about the men around you. Keep your eye on your gracious Master. Live and give to please Him in a grateful response to the death and resurrection of Christ that saved you from your sins. And then trust Him to reward your quiet faithfulness according to His great bounty.

Let's pray:

*O God, the one who trusts in You will never be disappointed. Thank You for what Jesus has taught us here in the Sermon on the Mount. Thank You, Father, for the clarity of the issues that are involved and yet, Father, with the understanding that these go to the deepest recesses and motives of our heart.*

*Father, for these that are here and those that will hear, I pray that their eyes would be focused on You, the true Giver, that their eyes would be focused on Jesus Christ, the Author and Perfector of their faith and that their deeds of righteousness would be done with an eye toward pleasing You, and that You would convict each one of us when we start to stray from that path, when we start to put our own name out there for the sake of our own glory. Father, guard us from that – guard us from that which would rob You of Your glory and would rob us of all reward from You.*

*Father, help us to see the praise of men, the approval of men, the notice of men, for what it really is: something fickle, something passing, here today, gone tomorrow, always someone else a little better than us to get a little bit more reward. Help us to just see that, see through it and detest it, so that the singular motive of our heart would be to live to please You, to love You and to keep our eye on the reward which You promised that will never fade away, that will never be lost before Your omniscient and omnipresent eyes.*

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*We love You and we honor You, and we devote ourselves in obedience to what You have said here. In Jesus' name, amen.*

*This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.*