

Matthew 6B

- There's an old joke about a pastor whose sermon ran on too long one Sunday
 - Finally, a man got up and left before the sermon ended and outside the church, a bystander asked him if the preacher was finished
 - The man replied, "Oh yes, he's finished, but he won't stop talking."
 - I was guilty of making that mistake last week, so I owe you some time back this week
 - Therefore, as we return to Chapter 6 today, I'll cover just the opening verses
 - But let's start tonight remembering how Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 of Jesus' sermon connect
 - In Chapter 5, Jesus exposed the Pharisee's wrong teaching about the Kingdom
 - Jesus explained how they taught wrongly about who would enter the Kingdom and what God's standard for righteousness was
 - Jesus said the Pharisees were not the standard for righteousness as they claimed
 - Instead, Jesus said God is our standard for righteousness
 - We are to be as perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect
 - That's the standard for entering the Kingdom, which we meet only through faith in Jesus Christ
 - But that's also the standard for our conduct while we await the Kingdom
- That last point leads us into to Jesus' topic for Chapter 6, which is the proper understanding of righteous conduct
 - Just as the Pharisees taught a false notion of the Kingdom, they also modeled a false way of living righteously now
 - So Jesus warns His followers not to follow the Pharisees' example in practicing righteousness

[Matt. 6:1](#) “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

- Jesus says beware of how you practice your righteousness before men
 - By necessity, we are always “practicing” our righteousness before both God and men
 - Because generally speaking, someone is always watching us and certainly God sees everything
 - But Jesus says there is a right way and a wrong way to practice righteousness before men
 - And the wrong way to live out your Christian witness is to do so in order to be noticed by men
 - Put simply, it’s wrong to pursue the approval of people, rather than to pursue the approval of God
 - Pharisees sought the approval of men, not God
 - And therefore, the reward they received was an earthly, manmade reward...
 - In the way they practiced their righteousness, the Pharisees received things like political power, earthly wealth, worldly praise, etc.
 - But in this chapter, Jesus begins by warning us not to follow their example
 - Instead, we need to live with eyes for eternity
 - We are to seek to please God rather than seeking to please ourselves or others
 - And we do this, knowing God is a rewarder of those who seek Him
 - When we live seeking to please God, we have opportunity to receive eternal rewards from the God Who sees
 - Things like Heavenly authority, Heavenly wealth, Heavenly praise – things that will come to us in the Kingdom

- Now back in Chapter 5, Jesus gave us six examples of how the Pharisees taught wrongly about righteousness from their oral law, the Mishnah
 - In each example, Jesus first quoted the Pharisees' wrong teaching and then proceeded to give the proper view of each issue
 - Now, again in this chapter, Jesus will follow the same pattern
 - He cites four examples where the Pharisees commonly sought the approval of men instead of God
 - These four issues hit upon the worst practices of the Pharisees
 - Specifically, they deal with giving to the poor, praying, fasting and wealth
 - In each of these areas, the Pharisees had made a mockery of serving God
 - In each case, they had constructed their practices to maximize public exposure for the purpose of courting the praises of men
 - And as He did in Chapter 5, Jesus follows His critique by explaining the correct perspective on giving, praying, fasting and wealth
 - So in this chapter, we learn more about the problems in Israel in Jesus' day
 - But more importantly, we'll understand how not to make the same mistakes
 - We'll gain a better appreciation for God's standard of service, for righteousness lived-out
 - Because just as God's standard for obtaining righteousness was much higher than the Pharisees', so is God's standard for living it out
 - Finally, in each example, Jesus' chief concern is ensuring that we preserve our opportunity for eternal reward
 - I taught briefly on the concept of reward last week
 - But we'll develop the concept more deeply as we move through these examples
 - But the main point is easy to grasp...we can either seek our reward here on earth or in Heaven

- But you can't have your cake and eat it too

Matt. 6:2 “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.

Matt. 6:3 “But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

Matt. 6:4 so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

- Jesus' first example is on the topic of giving to the poor, also known as giving alms
 - And as will be the case for each of the four examples, Jesus begins by denying the Pharisaic way of giving alms
 - Pharisees had contrived an outlandish and completely self-serving method of giving and encouraging others to give
 - To understand their method, we need to first understand the Jewish practice of giving in general
 - The Law of Moses stipulated that the Jews should give tithes for a variety of reasons
 - Jews were called to tithe for the care of the priests and the upkeep of the temple and to fund the annual feasts
 - And they were also told to take care of the poor
 - In general, they were to maintain a charitable attitude toward anyone in need

Deut. 15:7 “If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother;

Deut. 15:8 but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks.

- But the Lord also commanded Israel to tithe into a general fund for the needs of the most vulnerable in Jewish society

Deut. 26:12 “When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.

- Prior to entering the Babylonian captivity, around 600 BC, the Jewish people didn’t have synagogues or local places of worship
 - All tithing was directed toward the tabernacle/temple
 - Nothing precluded an individual Jew from providing charity to a neighbor, and the Law demanded as much
- But all institutional giving went to the temple
 - So Jews physically brought their tithes to the temple and deposited them there
 - Ancient writers report there were 13 large chests in the temple compound to gather the money as it was collected
 - Near the end of Jesus’ ministry, while He’s in the temple with His disciples, Jesus makes the following observation

Luke 21:1 And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury.

Luke 21:2 And He saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins.

Luke 21:3 And He said, “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them;

Luke 21:4 for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on.”

- The treasury Jesus mentions in that passage are the 13 chests in the temple compound
- During Israel’s captivity outside the land and away from the temple, the nation began the practice of meeting in local synagogues
 - Naturally, they began to bring their tithes to the synagogue too
 - Seventy years later, when they returned to the land under Zerubbabel, the Jewish people rebuilt the temple
 - And they returned to bringing tithes to the temple, as the Law required

- But the Jews also continued to establish local synagogues, in addition to the temple
 - And as they did, they also continued directing some of their giving to the synagogue, instead of directly to the temple
 - So each synagogue became a small, local treasury of its own, with local rabbis competing against the temple for donations
 - Naturally, competition breeds innovation
- So, the local rabbinical authorities began looking for ways to encourage giving to the local treasury
 - At some point, the Pharisees came upon the idea of announcing large donations at the synagogues with trumpets in the streets
 - The trumpeting would begin in the streets to draw a crowd
 - The Pharisees escorted the giver with his alms in a procession to the synagogue where the donation was made
- This scheme was mutually beneficial for both the Pharisees and the giver
 - For the giver, the trumpets garnered the attention of the community, stroking their egos and puffing up their pride
 - Someone once wrote that these donors weren't giving their money to the poor; they were buying attention for themselves
- But the scheme also benefitted the synagogue's rabbi
 - By lavishing public praise on givers, the Pharisees created a powerful incentive for others to give, as well
 - And their goal went beyond merely improving the balance sheet of the synagogue
 - Pharisees were corrupt men, lovers of money Jesus said, who had their hands in the cookie jar
 - So anything that brought more money into the treasury, also benefitted them personally
- In v.2, Jesus tells us what God thinks of people who give to the poor in this way
 - He calls them hypocrites

- The Greek word for “hypocrite” comes from a root word, meaning to act on a stage
- And that’s a good way to understand hypocrisy...it’s pretending to be something you’re not
- The giver’s hypocrisy was in pretending to be a humble benefactor, seeking to improve the plight of poor
 - When in reality, the giver had only selfish interests
 - First, he sought to improve his standing within the community by receiving maximum attention and credit for his donation
 - Secondly, he courted the approval of powerful rabbis, knowing it would pay dividends in the future when they needed a favor
- And the Pharisees’ hypocrisy was in pretending to be encouraging everyone to obey God’s commandment to give to the poor
 - While in reality, they were manipulating people for their own enrichment
 - The trumpets didn’t increase public concern for the poor
 - It just pressured everyone else to give more money, or else be shamed by the absence of trumpets
 - It was extortion
- Because of their hypocrisy, Jesus says each group had already received their reward in full
 - The reward Jesus was speaking about were the earthly gains each group obtained through their unholy alliance
 - The Pharisees received the money they so dearly desired
 - And the giver received the public attention they bought with their donation
 - Jesus says both groups should consider themselves fully rewarded for their behavior
 - Because there will be no additional reward in Heaven
 - Now, if we wanted to play devil’s advocate for a moment, we might point out that a donation *was* made and the poor *did* benefit

- So then, what's the big deal? Who cares about the method?
- Well, think back to Chapter 5 for a moment
- We learned that we don't have to commit murder in order to violate the sixth commandment
- And we don't have to cheat on our spouse to violate the seventh commandment
- If we so much as hate or lust in our hearts, then when we face the Lord on judgment day, we will be found equally guilty
- In other words, God cares about how we obey *both* the letter of His Law *and* the spirit of His Law
 - As the Pharisees proved, it's possible to keep the *letter* of the Law, yet still violate the *spirit* of the Law
 - And if we violate the spirit of God's Word, then any technical compliance with the letter of the Law counts for nothing
 - In fact, God cares so much about the spirit of the Law, that He is even willing to overlook violations in the letter of the Law when that violation is necessary to keep the spirit of the Law (*see First Samuel 21*)
- So now we're learning that the same principle applies to how we will be rewarded for our service to God
 - Even if we do the "right" thing, if we do it for the wrong reasons, we get no credit with God
 - God cares as much, or more, about our motives as He does about our actions
 - So in the case of givers, who made large donations to the poor to receive public praise, Jesus says they gained nothing with God
 - Why not?
 - Because in their hearts, they were motivated by selfish desires, rather than by a sincere desire to obey God's commands or to help the poor
 - So take note, God will not be fooled by our hypocrisy

- He does not reward selfish motives, even when our actions comply with His commands
- We can give all our money away, but if we do so for hypocritical reasons, we would be better to keep it for ourselves
- Because Jesus says you will have no reward with God
- As I mentioned before, the reward Jesus is talking about here is the eternal reward believers receive in the Kingdom
 - And Jesus is going to talk a lot about reward in this chapter
 - He mentions the word seven times
 - More importantly, Jesus explores the principle of reward in-depth as He moves through each of His examples
 - Beginning with what we've learned in this first example
 - Point 1: Reward in the Kingdom is based on more than our actions alone
 - Our reward is conditional on maintaining the proper spirit or heart motive behind everything we do in service to God
 - The Lord is ready and willing to reward a servant seeking to please Him, to obey with sincere intent
 - We put our reward at risk if we neglect to obey His commands
 - But we also put that reward at risk if pursue our obedience hypocritically, as man-pleasers rather than God-pleasers
 - Knowing this, we must guard our hearts against the temptation to receive our reward early – that is, on earth
 - As we go about serving Christ, we must continually inspect our motives
 - We have to be honest with ourselves about what we're doing and why we're doing it
 - So that when we recognize we're doing the right things for wrong reasons, we can address it
 - Obviously, we don't have people offering to blow trumpets when we make large donations to the Church

- Speaking for myself, that's a good thing, because I wouldn't want to be responsible for deafening so many people <a joke>
 - But we still have temptations to turn service to God into a "win-win" for God and for us
 - God gets what He wants and we get what we want
 - But Jesus says when we fall for that trap, we're actually getting less in the long run
 - Because we're trading imperishable, eternal rewards for temporary, earthly rewards
- In the case of giving to the poor, Jesus says the proper heart attitude is to give in such a way that our right hand doesn't know what our left hand is doing
 - This is a wonderful turn of phrase that's made its way into the culture
 - You'll hear people using Jesus' words across a variety of circumstances always to mean operating in total anonymity
 - What Jesus means is that our heart's desire should be to keep our giving completely concealed from public view
 - In fact, our giving should be so secretive that even our left hand is unaware of what our right hand is doing
 - Practically speaking, that means we should not seek public attention for our giving in any way
 - We shouldn't talk about what we give, don't ask for recognition, and don't even expect someone to notice
 - And just because we don't have trumpets by the offering box, that doesn't mean we don't have our own ways to accomplish the same effect
 - The modern Church has found its own ways to repeat the Pharisees' hypocrisy
 - For example, have you ever seen plaques hanging inside a church listing donors for a previous fund drive?
 - Or a brochure for the church-building campaign thanking "partners" for their contributions?

- Or maybe someone's name on a small plaque on the back of a pew?
- Or someone's name on the side of the building?
- More commonly, we risk spoiling our eternal reward with an idle brag in everyday conversation
 - Someone coined a modern term for the person who works a bragging comment into normal conversation
 - We call that person a "humblebrag"
 - For example, a humblebrag says things like:
 - "I need a vacation...I'm exhausted from my 2 weeks in Hawaii"
 - "Have you ever noticed how much longer it takes for large checks to clear your bank account? I'm still waiting for last month's tithe check to clear my account"
 - One prominent Christian pastor once tweeted to his followers:
 - "I'm truly humbled you follow my tweets...God bless all 200,000 of you!"
 - What do you think his real purpose was?
 - So be mindful of your pride and ego
 - They are always poised and ready to ruin opportunities for eternal reward
 - That's especially true when we're in the presence of a humblebrag who's going on and on about their accomplishments
 - As they toot their own horn, the temptation rises in each of us to compete with them on their terms
- But don't compete for their attention...be content with God's pleasure
 - And the key to pleasing God is to maintain pure motives
 - And Jesus says the best way to keep your motives pure is to give anonymously
 - The moment your check hits the bottom of the offering box, or your mouse clicks the donate button, forget it ever happened

- Say nothing more about it, expect nothing in return
- Because if you give in that way, then your flesh won't have interest in the transaction because there's no reward to be found
 - When you give secretly, the only reason for giving will be a sincere interest in blessing others from a heart desiring to please God
 - And Jesus says the Father sees both our giving and motives, and when we give expecting nothing here, He delights to reward us later
 - On the other hand, when we give in ways that bring attention to our gift, we forfeit eternal reward because we claimed our reward early
- Notice the contrast between the end of v.2 and Jesus' statement in v.4
 - To give in such a way that you receive honor from men means taking your reward now *instead* of receiving it in Heaven
 - And the point isn't whether you actually receive what you want...the point is whether you expected such things
 - If you give expecting an earthly return, Jesus says you have forfeited heavenly return regardless of whether you get what you wanted
 - On the other hand, giving in secret, understanding you are forgoing any recognition now, leaves opportunity for the Lord to reward you later
- Finally, I would be wrong if I didn't mention that this principle also guides how church leaders encourage giving within the body
 - We must police our own motives too, or else we may follow in the footsteps of the Pharisees blowing trumpets, so to speak
 - Leadership responsibilities will require that some elders or other church members are privy to the giving of other church members
 - Nevertheless, everyone must conduct himself or herself appropriately, despite having this information
 - Specifically, we can never share that information with others, for doing so is gossip and indiscretion

- But equally important, we must guard our own conduct so that we never treat someone differently based on their giving
 - For example, church leaders can never show special attention to those in the body who they know give at higher levels
 - That means no offers to join the elder board, no reserved seats or parking places, no special invitations to dinner or the ballgame
 - No insider information on major church decisions
 - And certainly no plaques and no names on the side of buildings
- If we do those things, we make it harder for those under our care to maintain a proper perspective on giving
 - We encourage the kind of hypocrisy Jesus taught against here
 - And we foster a culture of favoritism in the Church, which James specifically condemns in his letter
- Our goal as leaders in this church must be to maximize your potential eternal reward
 - Specifically, to ensure that everyone under our care enters the Kingdom by faith in Jesus Christ
 - That as the writer of Hebrews says,

Heb. 4:1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

- We don't want anyone in our midst to come up short of receiving God's grace
- But equally important, we care about maximizing the believer's reward
 - We don't want anyone under our care to arrive in the Kingdom on that future day having forfeited their eternal reward because we didn't prepare them for that moment
 - And preparing you means helping you gain eyes for eternity
 - First, teaching you Christ's commands in His Word, so you will understand His expectations, so you don't fall from ignorance

- And secondly, encouraging you to obey all that He commanded so that you won't fall from disobedience
- Again, as the writer of Hebrews put it

[Heb. 12:12](#) Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble,

[Heb. 12:13](#) and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

[Heb. 12:14](#) Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.