

Authentic Devotion

Matt 6:1-6, 16-18

Call: Ps 63:1-4, 7-8

Scripture Reading: Matt 6:1-18 (Sermon Text)

1 *“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*

2 *“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

5 *“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

7 *“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 Pray then like this:*

*“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.*

10 *Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.*

11 *Give us this day our daily bread,
12 and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

13 *And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.*

14 *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

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. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

I. Intro

After our summer study in the parables, we now enter back into my favorite text, the Sermon on the Mount. This is our third and final fall in this amazing sermon of Jesus, which I am calling Living Right-side up in an Upside-down World.

II. Review

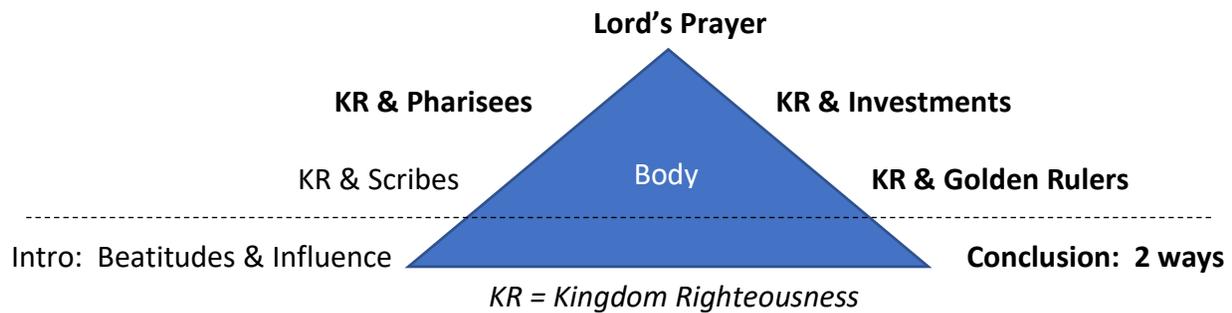
And, I want to take my introduction today to review and look forward to where we are going this fall. And, I'm going to do that by asking three key questions.

First of all, what is this sermon? Well, you could think of this sermon as Jesus' campaign speech for election day. In the sermon, Jesus is *describing*, not legislating, what kind of kingdom he is bringing when he is king. In this sermon, we get a description of what life will look like under the reign of him, King Jesus. He is *describing* what happens to people when they attach themselves to him, when they enter into relationship with him. This sermon understood this way, as not law, but as freedom, transforms how we understand what Jesus is doing here. I know for me, I grew up viewing this text as a mountain of impossibility. There is no way I can do this stuff! But, no, this text is all good news. It's not burden. It's promise! He promises to make this sermon come alive in my life. He promises to turn me right-side up in an upside down world. The surest sign that Jesus is alive in my life is that I am becoming a Sermon on the Mount person.

Secondly, what is the main theme of this great sermon? Righteousness. And, the way I define righteousness is right-relatedness or right-relationship. Righteousness is fundamentally a relational term. To be righteous is to be in a right-relationship. And, this righteousness is very big. As relational beings created in the image of a relational God, we were created to have relational wholeness and relational integrity that embraces our entire life.

1. We are designed to live in right relationships with others.
2. We are physical creatures living in a physical world so we are designed to live in right relationship with creation.
3. We are also psychological creatures so we are designed to live in right relationship with ourselves, to accept ourselves without any shame or guilt.
4. And, lastly, we are spiritual creatures, designed to live in right relationship with the living God. To live right-side up in an upside-down world is to attach ourselves to Jesus and have him transform our relationships, making us righteous.

Thirdly, where are we in the sermon?



If we look at this sermon as a sermon, we see an introduction, a body and a conclusion. In the fall of 2016, we looked at the introduction which is the Beatitudes and the influence of Beatitude people on the world, the influence being salt and light. Jesus expects his people to be salt and light in their little corner of the world.

Last fall, we moved into the body of the sermon, moving to kingdom righteousness. Verse 5:20 captures this movement.

[20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.](#)

Scribal Righteousness (5:17-48)

So, last fall, we looked at kingdom righteousness as compared to the scribes. These were the “you have heard it said, but I say to you” sayings. I called them “fulfillers,” many commentators call them antitheses. There were six of them: anger, lust, marriage, oaths, retaliation and love of enemies. The scribes were teaching the people certain things, and Jesus comes in and takes their teaching deeper. He takes it to the heart. For man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart (1 Sam 16:7).

Pharisaic Righteousness (6:1-18)

This fall, we will begin to look at kingdom righteousness as compared to the Pharisees. How does our righteousness exceed that of the Pharisees?

Rest of the Sermon (6:19-7:29)

The rest of the fall looks like this:

- We will then spend a few weeks on the Lord's Prayer which, as you can see, is the very apex of the sermon.
- We will then spend two weeks on Kingdom Righteousness as it relates to our Investments, with Jesus commanding us repeatedly, “Do not be anxious.”
- We will spend a week on the summation of the body of the sermon, which is found in The Golden Rule.

- And, we will finish with the conclusion, which is a decision point. Will we choose to follow Jesus and build our house on the rock, or will we not trust him and build our house on sand? The sermon ends with a decision that we all have to make. As with the parables, everything boils down to what we do with Jesus.

III. Intro: The Disciplines

That is our review and where we are going this fall. Now let's transition into our text today, chapter 6, 1-18. I will only focus on 1-6 and 16-18, the spiritual disciplines. In the middle of this passage, Jesus will focus more on prayer which includes the Lord's Prayer. As I already said, we will look at that text over the next few weeks. And, as I said, Jesus now focuses on His Kingdom Righteousness as compared to Pharisaic Righteousness. Does our righteousness exceed that of the Pharisees? And, for that, Jesus, the greatest cardiologist, will once again concentrate on our hearts. Later in Matthew, Jesus compares the Pharisees to whitewashed tombs. They are clean on the outside but their hearts are unclean, full of all kinds of unrighteousness (Matt 23:27-28). Their actions were inauthentic because their hearts were far from God. And, Jesus knows how we are designed, to have relational wholeness and integrity with hearts close to God. And so, Jesus takes us into the spiritual disciplines today.

Let me begin by saying a few words about the disciplines. Typically in the Evangelical community, people wince when this topic arises. The disciplines - such as giving, praying, fasting, Bible-reading, church-going, service, solitude, confession, etc. - are many times viewed as legalistic and burdensome. But, this is a faulty view of them. The disciplines are a means to an end, they are not the end. If they are the end, then they are an idol and will become burdensome and legalistic. No, they are a means to the end. The end is a love relationship. Our goal is a life of relationship and intimacy with the Father through the Son by the Spirit. And, the disciplines nurture and cultivate that relationship. They are for the sake of love. We love God enough to seek out time with him. The Psalmist writes:

*1 O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you;*

The disciplines are evidence of thirsting for God.

I also think people wince at the disciplines because we think we do not have enough time.

Disciplines take time and to quote Veggie Tales we are –

*“busy, busy, dreadfully busy
You've no idea what I have to do
Busy, busy, shockingly busy
Much, much too busy for you God”*

We are so busy, we don't have time to do the disciplines. And, for that, let me do an object lesson. [The object lesson was about putting the disciplines into our lives first otherwise they won't get in.] I think we have much more control over our time than we think we do.

As I have said before, we are mal-formed 6 days a week by our culture. And, 90 minutes on a Sunday morning will not counter-form us. But, practicing the disciplines throughout the week will make a huge difference. Because little things repeated over time have a formative effect

on us. Almost nothing in the Spiritual life comes quickly, and it takes time to form habits of the heart using NT Wright's words (Wright, 274). But, remember – this is not law. The disciplines are for the sake of love. If a discipline is missed, don't worry about it. Move on. It's not law.

Once again, what we find today are hard hitting texts from Jesus. In fact, many people have said that chapter six of Matthew is the most uncomfortable chapter in the entire Bible. But, he is telling us these things in order to free us, in order to make us whole, in order to lead us to become authentically human. In so doing, he is going to protect our hearts and this morning, we see him protecting the disciplines.

So, I invite you into our text this morning, Matthew 6:1, where Jesus provides the main principle and driving thought for the rest of our text today:

IV. The Main Principle: Motivation (1)

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”

Notice he begins with a command: beware. A better translation might be, “Be on your guard!” The Message says, “Be especially careful!” For what are we to be “especially careful?” For your motivation in doing your righteousness. Always be checking that your motivations are pure. In the kingdom life, motivation is absolutely crucial, so be especially careful that you don't become motivated to exercise the spiritual disciplines in such a way that they are unrewarding or fruitless. Our righteousness can actually become unrighteous if done in the wrong way. Jesus' concern here is authentic devotion so he calls us to constant vigilance. We have to constantly watch our motivations. We always have to be on your guard.

V. The Three Disciplines (2-6, 16-18)

Now in the rest of the text, Jesus gives three illustrations. As with the 6 fulfillers of chapter five, Jesus does not exhaustively cover all disciplines. He simply gives illustrations for living the kingdom life. Here, he gives three illustrations, three spiritual disciplines:

1. Verses 2-4: giving (a specific kind of giving – almsgiving or giving to the poor),
2. Verses 5-6: praying and
3. Verses 16-18: fasting.

Three disciplines that are common to all religions. And, for each of the three disciplines, Jesus gives a common structure.

- a. Prohibition: When you (give, pray, fast), do not ____ (2a, 5a, 16a).
 - When you **give**, do not sound a trumpet! Don't advertise yourself...
 - When you **pray**, do not stand and pray in public to be seen by men. This reminds us of the Pharisee and Publican parable that Ryan taught this summer. The Pharisee stands in a prominent place to pray. The publican stands afar off. Jesus says, don't be like the Pharisee to be seen by others...
 - And, when you **fast**, do not look gloomy and disfigure your face to be seen by men...

- A word on fasting here because it is not as common as the other disciplines. Fasting is looked down upon in many ways because of eating disorders and such. And, for specific reasons, like eating disorders, fasting should be discouraged. Additionally, fasting must be exercised with wisdom and caution and with a trusted adult. And, it is not for everyone at all times. However, fasting is a critical discipline to be recovered. Why? Because fasting reveals the things that control us. Fasting exercises the muscle of self-control. And, not only externally, but internally as well. Richard Foster says it this way, “Fasting causes things to surface... Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear – if they are within us, they will surface during fasting” (Foster, 55). And, even though Jesus is speaking specifically about fasting from food here, fasts can include anything: electronics (screens), shopping (Amazon), coffee, etc. Fasting is especially important to re-discover in a consumeristic culture like ours.
- Structure of these three disciplines, after the prohibition, Jesus gives the result. In each case, if you do the discipline to be seen by others, he says:
 - b. Result: *“Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.”* (2b, 5b, 16b)
 - Reward here actually means “reward in full.” Your full reward is received when you do the disciplines to be seen by others.
- a. Positive action: But, **when** you (give, pray, fast), do it this way: *“in secret”* (3, 6, 17)
 - b. Result: *“And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”*

Now notice one important observation here. Jesus says “when.” Jesus says, “When you (give, pray, fast).” He does not say, “if you (give, pray, fast).” Jesus says “when.” Jesus presumes we will do these things. According to Jesus, the disciplines are not optional. They are a concrete part of life in the kingdom, for everyone. In other words, these disciplines are not just for the professionals or the super disciples, these disciplines are for everyone, ordinary people, people who have jobs, who care for children, who go to school – teenagers, who wash dishes, who mow lawns. They’re for everyone. If you attach yourself to Jesus, he presumes the practicing of the disciplines.

But, “always be on your guard.” It always comes back to motivation. Beware! Be especially careful! Always ask why are we doing them? Jesus is protecting the spiritual disciplines here. But, why? As we said earlier, the disciplines nurture our relationship with the living God. They are for the sake of love. They nurture our life in the kingdom. People may notice when we do the disciplines. If so, that’s fine if they do. However, we are not to do them to be noticed. And, that’s not an easy thing to do. Our pride is subtle, especially when our culture forms us everyday to seek self-publicity in everything. Doesn’t social media encourage self-promotion? It’s all externals, about me, myself and I and typically focuses on how to make myself look good? For the disciplines we need to always be on our guard. Be especially careful of our motivation.

Now, just to be clear, the issue is not visible vs. invisible, or public vs. private. Jesus is not talking about public worship here. He is talking about worship for publicity (Guelich, 301). The issue is motive.

- Why do I give money for the needy?
- For whose ears am I praying?
- For whose eyes am I fasting?
- For whose eyes do I do worship for?

It's a good reminder to all of us on this stage on Sundays. We always have to check our motivation that we are not coming up here for your approval, although we do like your encouragement. But, we are up here to please the sender. That's why we are up here. But, we always must be especially careful.

VI. The Five Truths about Life

Now I want to take a step back and look at this text as a whole, because I think this text highlights five fundamental truths about life.¹

1. **We live as actors in a grand drama.** There are two words in this text which come to us from the world of drama. The first one is the Greek word behind "in order to be seen" in verse 1. This word is "θεαθῆναι." This word is where we get the word "theatre" from. It means to perform before an audience. The second is the Greek word behind "hypocrite," "ὑποκριτής." Jesus uses this word three times, negatively for each discipline, verses 2, 5 and 16. As you probably know, this noun refers to an actor in a play who wears a mask and takes on the character of another. This person is a pretender, pretending to be someone else. The use of these two words helps point to the truth that we are all actors in a grand drama, so are we being authentic or are we pretending?
2. **We live before an audience.** There are no secrets in life. Jesus says this for each discipline, verses 4, 6 and 18. There are no secrets in life because our "Father sees in secret." The Living God knows all: our thoughts, our words, our actions, our hearts. God knows the content of every top secret file. God knows every undercover agent. God knows where every hostage is being held. God knows the name of every orphan in Liberia and beyond. God knows every tear that drops from all of our eyes. He knows all. Now knowing this truth can be comforting and terrifying at the same time. It all depends on whether I want to be known and seen at any given moment.

The truth is that many people want to hide from God, like Adam and Eve in the Garden. In our culture, we're great at hiding. We typically hide behind noise, the noise of entertainment. We're afraid of what will happen if we turn it off. We're afraid that we might hear God's footsteps pursuing us. We hide behind our busy-ness. If we keep busy, we won't have time to consider that God is watching of us. We hide behind

¹ These five principles come from Darrell Johnson's Sermon on the Mount course at Regent College, *Living in Sync: Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*.

academics or achievements or chemicals or alcohol or even cynicism or fatalism. But, we can even hide behind religion. We don't even need to go to the far country as the Prodigal did. We can hide like the elder son, doing all the right things but our hearts are far from our Good Father. "This is why Luther often insisted that our righteousness is more dangerous than our sin" (Bruner, 282).

None of these hiding places will work though. God is the hound of heaven. God seeks us out, like he did with Adam and Eve in the garden. And, so there are no secrets in life. We are always living before an audience.

3. **We live to be seen.** We all want to be seen. We live before an audience and we want to be seen. We crave attention and affirmation. We all want to be noticed. This desire is not wrong. We know every child says to their parents, "watch me!"

At Family Camp this year at breakfast, one small boy came over to the table where I was talking to his father. He said to his father, "Hey dad, can you come look at my waffles. I spread the butter and syrup in every single hole!"

Even when we grow up, we all say "watch me," we just say it in different ways. I think Jesus is telling us here that we were made to be noticed by God and therefore we need to focus on being noticed by him, because #4:

4. **We live with constant choices.** Life is a series of choices. For whom will I perform? For whose admiration will I seek? The living god or other people or even myself? Sometimes we can do the disciplines to be seen by ourselves.

It can be pretty frustrating. I get up and read and pray in the mornings and some mornings I will write my prayers. And I catch myself reading over my prayers and thinking wow, where can I pray this awesome prayer? What a great sounding prayer! It will sound good at a staff meeting. Sometimes I will write my prayer then look back over it and see an amazing chiasm! If you don't know what that is, don't worry about it. It's terrible!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says this: "I can lay on a very nice show for myself even in the privacy of my own room. That is the extent to which we can distort the word of Jesus. (Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship* (Kindle Locations 2100-2102)).

Our pride is so subtle so we always have to be especially careful. For whom am I desiring to be noticed? The choice is constantly before us, because #5:

5. **We receive the reward we desire.** The word "reward" is used twice for each discipline; once for the "reward in full" when the discipline is done for the audience of people (including myself), and once for the reward from the Father when the discipline is done for God. We receive the reward we desire. When we give, pray and fast to be seen by

people, we get what we seek, ie. a spiritual reputation. People will call us spiritual. We get a “spiritual reputation” and that will be the end of it. We will receive our reward in full. The praise of men and that’s it. Jesus is saying that if I give or pray or fast in order to be seen by others, I get people’s praise and that’s it. Paid in full, says Jesus.

But, the good news is that if we give, pray and fast with the right motivation – to be seen by God – then he will see and will reward us.

So, what is this reward? Many people seem to be embarrassed by this idea of a reward. Many people want to think that kingdom devotion has nothing to do with rewards. Apparently, Jesus doesn’t think so. Jesus speaks of rewards many places throughout the Gospels. William Barclay says it this way, “We ought to be very careful that we do not try to be more spiritual than Jesus was in our thinking about this matter of reward” (Barclay, 178). So, what then is this reward? The key is in verse 1. *Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward “with/from” your Father who is in heaven.* The NASB translates this as “with” your father in heaven, whereas the NIV and ESV translates this as “from.” I tend to side with the NASB here in that Jesus is saying that the reward is the relationship with the father, to be alongside the father forever and ever. That’s the reward I think Jesus is speaking of here. It is to be with the Father. Now, it just so happens that to be adopted into God’s family through Jesus also means we get everything that is the Father’s, just like Little Orphan Annie got everything that was Daddy Warbucks. Therefore, we get everything “from” the father as well.

VII. The Implications

Those are five fundamental truths about life that come out of this text. But, stay on your guard Jesus says. Be especially careful that “when” you give, pray and fast – when you do your spiritual disciplines – do them with the right motivation. So –

1. **Just give.** Be motivated to just give. Just give and don’t even let yourself know what you’re doing. Just give and forget about it. And, your Father will reward you.
2. **Just pray.** Be motivated to just pray. Go into your closet if you have to, because the closet removes you from watching eyes. Just pray, and your Father will reward you.
3. **Just fast.** Be motivated to just fast. Don’t look somber and gloomy. Just go about your normal routines. Humble yourself before God in secret. Just fast and your Father will reward you.

And, remember, it is all for the sake of love. Amen.

VIII. Benediction

Now receive this benediction adapted from Hebrews 13:

“Now may the God of peace,
who raised up Jesus from the dead,
equip you in every good thing to do His will.

May he purify your motivations,
And cause you to desire time with him,

And, through it all may he work in you that which is
pleasing in His sight,
through Jesus Christ,
to whom be the glory forever and ever.
Amen.”

Resources:

William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Christbook: Matthew 1-12*

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

Darrell Johnson, *Living in Sync: Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*

Martin Lloyd Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*

NT Wright, *After you Believe: Why Christian Character Matters*