

4.16.21
A Heart of Worship
Matthew 6:1-18

Have you seen a really good movie lately? Not necessarily a new one but a movie that the acting in it was so good that the individuals who did the acting, you forgot who they were in real life and you really bought into the character they were portraying.

Michal and I watched an older English movie a few weeks ago and we mentioned to each other how well their acting was. There were no special effects only the facial expressions and voice inflections.

Well, in our passage in Matthew this morning Jesus points to a number of individuals who are actors. They are people within the church but what they are doing is just acting the part, probably not very convincingly though.

In fact, before we read the passage I wanted to give you a definition. Most of you have heard the word hypocrite. It is generally used for someone who is in the church and they are going through the motions but they are not really worshipping God, from the heart anyway. But here is an interesting thing about the word hypocrite. Did you know that the word hypocrite finds its root in the word actor? I thought that was a pretty good fit.

A hypocrite is someone who is acting like they are something they are not. In our passage Jesus calls out a few individuals and His main point is...do not be like them.

Let's begin with just the first verse of Chapter 6.

Matthew 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."

In this portion of the sermon on the mount Jesus shares that there is an expectation of people living righteous lives. Righteousness as you know is right living according to God. There are a lot of ways to live this life but only one way is the way of righteousness. That is getting to know Jesus and His ways and then following them.

This is what the teachings of Jesus are all about. He is teaching His disciples kingdom of God principles, that if they adopt and live by them in their lives, they will have the full blessing, protection and provision of the Creator of the Universe in their lives.

But just going through the motions of church life is not enough. Acting is not enough. As always, Jesus is after our hearts. He doesn't care about our service as much as He cares about our hearts.

A heart that is surrendered to God will serve but a heart that serves God and is not surrendered will not experience God's blessings.

So Jesus says, yes, serve Me and the church in many ways but be cautious of your motives. Beware of serving in such a way to be noticed and praised by men. Let's read verse 2.

Matthew 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."

Jesus was pointing to individuals who loved to have others see how much they were giving, how much they are serving and maybe how much they were sacrificing. Some of their service was just so people would look at them and say wow, look at him or her. They dedicate a lot of time to the church. They give a lot, serve a lot, sacrifice a lot. Maybe we should name a building after them or at least give them a lot of recognition.

While there is nothing wrong with recognition, it is nice to be appreciated, but when a person gives or serves just to be recognized, then Jesus says that is not a good thing.

In fact, Jesus says this several times.

Matthew 6:1, “They have no reward with your Father in heaven.”

Matthew 6:2, “They have their reward in full.”

Matthew 6:5, “They have their reward in full.”

Matthew 6:16, “They have their reward in full.”

There’s no special blessing from God for their service because they were only serving themselves. And they praise they received from people was all they were going to get.

Jesus applies this teaching to giving to the poor, praying and fasting. He first gives a negative example, a do not be like these, then He gives instructions about how to handle yourself with spiritual disciplines.

We already read the do not be like example of how to give. Let’s now read the do not be like example of praying and fasting.

Matthew 6:5, “When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites (actors); for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues (churches) and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.”

Matthew 6:16, “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.”

There must have been some real characters around when Jesus was teaching. Of course, if you watch some of the religious channels today and you will see some similar characters wont you?

Long drawn out prayers with a lot of generated emotions. Fasting in such a way that people will look at them and comment on how pious, how spiritual these individuals must be. Giving to the poor with a lot of pomp and circumstance.

Can you imagine the acting that was and is going on. The hyper emotion generated from within and not the Holy Spirit? There is nothing wrong with genuine emotion in praise and service. Sometimes I wonder if we are not experiencing enough emotion when we consider all that our Lord went through to bring salvation to us. Or when we consider the love God has for us as He constantly forgives, protects and provides for us in spite of ourselves.

Here is what God is after. He is after worship, in its many forms, that flows from a tender and surrendered heart. Jesus tells us what that looks like.

Matthew 6:3-4, “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.”

Matthew 6:6-7, “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.”

Matthew 6:17-18, “But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting 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.”

When it comes to giving I believe Jesus’ teaching applies to all of our giving to the Lord. Whether it be to the church of Jesus Christ or through the ministries you support, Jesus would have us examine why we give and how we give.

In this particular area of giving I don't think most of us have any issues in the way we give. There is now an opportunity to give privately through our on-line format. Some of you mail in or drop of your tithe check and some still give in the offering plate.

You have been very generous and faithful in your giving to God's church and it has allowed us to expand the ministry of sharing Jesus in this community. All I would say is, be prayerful about your giving and continue to be faithful as the Lord leads.

Now when it comes to public praying, that is not something most of you are involved in. But there are times when some of you are up here, in front and there are times when you are asked to pray in smaller groups. Again, as I have been around a lot of you, I don't think praying with a lot of pride, with a lot of false emotions is an issue. Jesus is pointing to those who do public praying.

Jesus does say this...

“But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret...”

Now, I don't believe Jesus is saying that every time you pray it has to be in private. There are many opportunities for us to pray quietly and silently when we are in church. As we close our eyes and focus on God then we are transported to our private place even in the midst of a very public place. Our prayers are secret prayers, made in the presence of God only.

When it comes to fast Jesus said this. **“But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men...”**

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that was common in the days of Jesus and still is in many circles. Fasting is led by the Holy Spirit as a time of personal self-denial. When you read about fasting in the Bible it is mostly talking about doing without food. A person is led by the Holy Spirit to skip a meal or many meals in order to draw near to God.

By fasting from food, Facebook, computers or screen time of any sort or the many other ways of self-denial you are saying to God a couple of different things.

First, you are saying that nothing but God shall have control over you. Not food, not phones, not computer, not sports. When I was studying for the ministry I fasted from bird hunting. I was living in pheasant central in upper Kansas and I loved going out on the weekend hunting. But God laid upon my heart that if I wanted to spend time with Him as I engaged in my studies, that if I would give up hunting for a season, He would bless me with more of His presence. And He did. My studies went well through that season of self-denial and God blessed and used this time to propel Michal and I into ministry.

And that is the second thing to God when you fast. You want more of Him. You want less of what the world has, what the body demands, and you are willing to do without so you can have more of God.

I have fasted from a number of things. I have not fasted from food as much as I would like but it is on my to do list.

You have a resource listed in your notes if you want to study some more on the spiritual benefits of fasting. You can find this book on Amazon.

Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough by Elmer Towns.

Now as we read through the 3 spiritual disciplines mentioned, giving, praying and fasting, did you notice what I have underlined in each verse? Let's look again.

Matthew 6:3-4, “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.”

Matthew 6:6-7, “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.”

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When service to the Lord flows out of a heart that is pure, humble, not self-serving, there is a reward straight from the hand of God.

1. Rewards of service from the heart:

James 4:8a, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

- a. The greatest reward of serving God by our giving, our prayers and our fasting is God will give more of Himself to us.**

There is no greater reward in this life than having the Creator of the Universe reveal more of Himself to us. God reveals more of His love and His capacity to forgive under any circumstance. He reveals just how patient He is with you. He reveals how much He cares about your every circumstance. This is one of the blessing Jesus is speaking about in these verse. A blessing of having more of God.

I believe also when Jesus says your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you I believe He means that

b. God will give you more of His power. His power to be more graceful, merciful, loving, forgiving and patient.

When God reveals Himself more to us He is bringing so many wonderful things with Him. It is His desire for us to be like His Son Jesus so those around you can be exposed to the love and forgiveness of God so what does He do? He brings the attributes of His Son Jesus into our hearts in a stronger way.

As scripture says we go from glory to glory, growing more and more to be like Jesus.

c. God gives us greater faith and trust in Him

As we serve God from a pure heart I believe one of the reward He gives us is the understanding, faith and patience to allow Him to unveil His plan in our lives and in the world.

So many things come into our lives that we don't understand. A sudden death, a sickness, a job change, a life change of some kind, coronavirus, a country on the verge of civil unrest, a government who is taking God out of everything. Any number of things can and do and will come into our lives throughout our stay on earth.

One of the rewards I believe Jesus is promising is God comes along and tells us, it is okay, I've got this. This events, even though you don't understand them, even though they are uncomfortable and hard, they fit into My perfect plan.

In the teachings in these passages I think what Jesus is saying is, don't miss out on the good stuff God has for you. Don't get caught up in the immediate and temporary praise that can come from people. My Father, the God of the Universe has something better for you.

Jesus does start off this whole section by saying beware. It is easy for anyone to have their flesh and the praise of men grab them. Do a heart check. Why are you giving of your time, talent and treasure. Why are you praying and why are you fasting.

If it is from a pure heart, then you walk among the blessed and you will get to see, hear and experience more of My Father who is in heaven.

This is what I want for you because I love you so very much and I only want the best for you.

Let's pray