

036: Rewards for Secrets

(based on Sermon #31 in the Life of Christ Series)

What do you do in secret?

- Please don't think about your "dirty laundry."
- I'm not asking about the *bad habits* you practice when you are alone.
- I'm asking about the *good deeds* you do that please the Lord, even when no one is looking.
- In the first eighteen verses of Matt. 6, Jesus identifies three things that God wants you to do when you are alone — secretly and privately — just between you and Him:
 - 1. Acts of Kindness
 - 2. Occasional Fasting
 - 3. Personal Prayer

God doesn't want you to tell anyone else when you do these things.

- In fact, if you will do these three things privately, then God will reward you *openly*, that is, publicly.
- Jesus makes it very clear in the text that if you do these things to be seen of men, then you have the reward for which you seek — being seen by men and, perhaps, praised by men.
- That's as far as it goes.
- On the other hand, if you do these things privately, with no desire for others to see or know, then God will reward you openly.
- That is the focus of these eighteen verses.
- Keep in mind the broader context of the Sermon on the Mount.

In this sermon Jesus gives the qualifications for inheriting the kingdom of the heavens.

- If you want to rule with Jesus and dwell in His city of reward, the new Jerusalem, then you must live in this manner — doing good deeds, not to be seen of men, but because you love the Lord. Notice first: Matt. 6:1-4
- Matt. 6:1 Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.
- 2 Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.
- 3-4 But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

1. Acts of Kindness

- The NKJV refers to this as "doing charitable deeds," while the KJV calls it "doing alms."
- Alms are gifts, specifically, monetary gifts or food donations given for the needy.
- The ESV refers to it as "giving to the needy."
- We don't use the phrase "giving alms" in our modern culture, unless we happen to hear it in an old play, such as Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol."
- A more modern rendition would be "giving to the needy" or — even better — "doing acts of kindness."
- The reason that I prefer "acts of kindness" is because the Greek word is bigger than merely giving monetary gifts.
- It could also be *doing* something for someone who has a need.

The word carries the idea of demonstrating compassion in a tangible way.

- In fact, Strong say the word means “compassionateness” or “beneficence.”
- Such a heart of giving can be expressed in many ways.
- Some commentators point out that in ancient times needs were announced in the streets by the blowing of trumpets, so that collections could be made publicly for all to see.
- The trumpets drew attention to those who were giving, by prompting the givers to walk out to the basket and drop in their gift.
- This practice gave the scribes and Pharisees public notoriety, which they loved.
- Public acclaim motivated them to give all the more.
- Were those blowing the trumpets deliberately capitalizing on man’s desire to be seen and recognized?

Now an important question:

- If someone were to give when the trumpet was blown, but they had no desire to be seen by men — they simply wanted to give to the need, but they didn’t make a show of it — would it be wrong for them to give in this way?
- Of course not! Jesus is not condemning the giving; He is condemning the improper *motive* for giving.
- Examine your own life. Do you give to others who have needs?
- What is it that drives you to give?
- Do you want to be seen or do you simply want to meet the need?
- We must be very careful here, because we could convince ourselves that we have no desire to be seen,

when in reality we do. Selfish motivations can be very subtle.

When you give, it is best not to let your left hand know what your right hand is doing (see v. 3).

- In other words, give privately, not with fanfare.
- Give because you delight in giving, not because others are watching you do it.
- Obviously, the recipient of your gift is going to know that you gave, and that is perfectly acceptable, for your gift is a tangible demonstration of your love to that person.
- But don’t give in a manner that puts you in the spotlight with others; give privately, whenever possible.
- What are some ways you can do acts of kindness for others?
- Certainly, by giving a financial gift, if that is the need, and if you have the ability to give money.
- But someone could be overwhelmed in life due to circumstances and need help in other ways.
- Perhaps you could meet their need by providing a meal at an appropriate time, or by having them over to your home for food and fellowship.

Maybe someone needs help with a project, and you can provide some manual labor.

- Have you ever helped someone change a flat tire?
- That is an act of kindness.
- I was once driving on a busy four-lane highway in my area and saw a pickup truck that had lost its entire load of lumber when going up a hill.
- Someone had stopped to help the driver reload it on the busy road.
- That act of kindness met a spur-of-the-moment need, and I’m sure it was greatly appreciated.

- The sky is the limit as to the various kinds of deeds you can do for people.
- The point is, God wants you to do in love, not broadcasting it for public acclaim.
- If you do acts of kindness privately, then God will reward you openly when you meet Him at the Judgment Seat.

Here's something else to think about:

- Do you suppose it's possible to leave the impression that you are giving when you are not? —
- Or that you are giving more than you are actually giving?
- Would that not be another form of wanting to be seen by men?
- Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of that.
- They lied about the sum they had given to the apostolic church ministry, with the intent of convincing others they had given everything, though they hadn't, so that others would think they had done something very special.
- God judged immediately, killing them both, sending shockwaves throughout the early church.
- The severity of judgment demonstrates what God thinks of those who want public acclaim for their giving.

To those who want others to notice their acts of kindness, Jesus says, "Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward."

- They get what they desire: the temporal reward of being seen by men.
- What a tragedy, for they have thereby forfeited reward at the Bema Seat of Christ.
- Do acts of kindness privately, as a demonstration of your compassion for people, and God will reward you publicly.
- That leads to a second thing God wants you to do in secret.
- Matt. 6:16-18

- Matt. 6:16 Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.
- 17-18 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

2. Occasional Fasting

- Fasting is the voluntary setting aside of something — typically food — for a period of time, usually for the purpose of focusing on prayer.
- It could be in response to calamity or sinfulness or some other heartfelt sorrow.
- Fasting is not commanded in the Scriptures, except for Israelites on the Day of Atonement (assuming that is the meaning of the term *afflict your souls* in Lev. 23:27).
- While fasting may be a good practice, at times, for New Testament Christians, it is not required and does not, of itself, contribute to spirituality.
- For a person could fast for all the wrong reasons and never benefit spiritually.

The scribes and Pharisees ritually fasted twice a week, because they thought it contributed to their spirituality.

- But it was legalistic and burdensome so that, oftentimes, they would merely give the *appearance* of fasting, while not *actually* fasting.
- They put themselves through this inconvenience, so as to appear to be upholding the Pharisaic traditions, which they equated with the Word of God.
- Their act — which was no more than hypocritical piety — was accomplished by disfiguring their faces.

- Rather than grooming as normal, they would refrain from washing their face or combing their hair, instead, applying ashes to simulate the experience of fasting.
- Additionally, they would appear in public with a sad, gloomy countenance.
- Jesus doesn't condemn fasting, but He condemns the hypocritical practice of *appearing* to fast.
- It is nothing more than an act, designed to impress people.
- Those who do such things "have their reward," as Jesus says in v. 16.
- In other words, being seen by men, which is their desire, becomes their reward.
- Sadly, they forfeit any reward in the age to come.

How should fasting be carried out?

- Jesus teaches in v. 17 the importance of acting normal.
- Don't put on a show.
- Groom yourself as usual, as on any other day.
- Wash your face and comb your hair.
- Nobody should know that you are fasting.
- Then the heavenly Father will see your sincere, secret fasting, and He will reward you openly.
- This undoubtedly assumes that fasting be accompanied by spiritual activity that is pleasing to the Lord, such as heartfelt prayer — for fasting, of itself, doesn't win God's favor.
- Now pause for a moment, and ask yourself some important questions.

Are you guilty of doing good things to be seen of others?

- Are you hypocritical at times, putting on an act?
- Do you give or serve because of what you get out of it, or because of what others might think?

- Do you teach a Sunday School class or volunteer to clean the church or serve in the nursery or serve in some other public capacity so you look good to others?
- What motivates you to do good things?
- If your motivations are self-seeking, then you have your reward.
- Your works will burn up at the Judgment Seat and you will not be rewarded there.
- What a dreadful thought!
- We must all examine our motives before the Lord and make any adjustments, as needed, in light of God's Word.

Jesus mentions a third thing God wants you to do in secret.

- Matt. 6:5 When you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.
- 6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.
- 7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.
- 8 Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

3. Personal Prayer

- Jesus condemns two modes of praying.
- **a. Praying to be seen of men.**
- The scribes and Pharisees loved to pray, standing in the synagogues or in the street corners (the intersections),

obvious public places, where they could be seen by everyone.

- Undoubtedly, they prayed syrupy, sanctimonious prayers.
- For example, Jesus shared the prayer of the Pharisee in Luke 18:
- Luke 18:11-12 “God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.”
- The Pharisees cared about what others thought of them.
- They wanted to be seen and held in high regard by their countrymen.
- Jesus again assures that those who pray in this manner “have their reward” — and once again, the reward is being seen of men, which is temporal.
- They will not be rewarded in the age to come.

Oh, that we would long for God’s approval, not man’s — not only in doing acts of kindness or fasting, but also in the matter of praying.

- His approval is what counts!
- Incidentally, when Jesus urges secret, private prayer, rather than public prayer in v. 6, He is not saying we should never pray publicly.
- Indeed, public prayer factored largely in the early church in Acts 1-4.
- It was also a major part of the great public assemblies in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.
- The right kind of public prayer is pleasing to the Lord.
- Praying for man’s praise is what Jesus condemns.
- Public prayer should be backed up by seasons of private prayer in one’s prayer closet, which is any private, quiet place where one can get alone with God.

- The point of Jesus is clear in the text:
- God doesn’t reward public praying that is motivated by seeking man’s acclaim.
- He rewards private praying that seeks to meet with God.

Jesus condemns another mode of praying in v. 7

- **b. Vain repetitions.**
- This is the empty, hollow repeating of certain words or phrases or even certain prayers verbatim.
- It is impersonal and without meaning, used by pagans to attract the attention of their gods.
- Even many Christians think excessive talking is what God hears and what wins His favor.
- That thinking is erroneous!
- Jesus condemns this behavior, commanding in v. 8, “Do not be like them.”
- God is ready to hear the prayers of His people.
- He knows your needs before you ever come to Him in prayer.
- He doesn’t want empty repetition of words.
- He merely wants to hear your heart cry of faith, your dependence on Him to meet the need.
- After dealing with the *mode* of prayer Jesus turns to the *content* of prayer.

Matt. 6:9-15

- 9 In this manner, therefore, pray: 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 forgive our debtors.

- 13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.
- 14 For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
- 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

By using the term “our Father,” Jesus emphasizes the intimate nature of prayer.

- We are not conversing with some unapproachable deity who is cruel and needs to be cajoled.
- We are talking with our great God, whom we can address, using endearing terms.
- As our Father, He is loving and compassionate.
- At the same time, He is a great protector and provider.
- Thus, when we pray, we should recognize to whom we are praying and conversing.
- Not only is He our Father, He is also in Heaven.
- This means our prayers should have an eternal focus.
- We are not praying to gratify our flesh.
- We are praying with eternity in view.
- Prayer enables us to look at the things which are not seen.
- I remember back in college hearing Jerry Falwell say many times: “Nothing of eternal significance is ever accomplished apart from prayer.” That is so true.

Here is an exciting thought:

- There is a *man* in heaven, Jesus, who is seated at the right hand of the Father.
- Though He is God, He understands us, for He has a human body and lived on Earth, having experienced the same things we do.

- Heb. 4:14-16 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
- That is how our prayers are connected to Heaven.
- Jesus our Mediator, our high priest, is seated at the Father’s right hand.
- Through prayer, we can enjoy the blessings of eternity here and now, and so our prayers need to be eternally focused.
- In His model prayer, Jesus outlines a series of seven prayer requests.
- Much of our praying should be focused on the subject matter of these requests.

What Should We Pray For?

- **1. That God’s name be hallowed.**
- *To hallow* is to make holy.
- The idea here is having a tremendous reverence or awe for who God is.
- Essentially, we are to ask for a fear of God in our lives.
- Peter said, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts” (1 Peter 3:15).
- *Sanctify* comes from the same Greek word translated *hallowed* — making God holy, or set apart, in one’s heart.
- The name of God signifies His character, who He is.
- So this is a prayer for the name of the Lord to be holy and consecrated — set apart — in our life and behavior.
- What should we pray for?

2. That God's kingdom would come.

- The particular Greek word translated *come* conveys the idea of a sudden, instantaneous coming.
- This is asking for Christ's millennial kingdom to be launched, which is not typically on the minds of Christians.
- Most Christians think of dying and going to Heaven.
- There is little talk of the millennial reign of Christ in most churches, despite it being a critical doctrine of the Scriptures — not to mention, an exciting era yet to come, the golden age.
- Those saints who qualify will have the privilege of ruling together with Jesus in His kingdom.
- One of the qualifications is being rightly motivated in all we do, including our prayer life.
- The more I learn about Christ's Messianic kingdom, the more I long for it, the more I cry out in my heart and mind, "even so come, Lord Jesus" — not so I can go to Heaven, but so I can see His glorious kingdom on Earth and His heavenly new Jerusalem, the city of reward.
- What should we pray for?

3. That God's will be done on Earth (as it is in Heaven).

- God's will is carried out perfectly in Heaven, so this is actually a prayer for God's will to become our will — that His will would prevail on this Earth, here and now.
- That only happens through prayer.
- Prayer changes things.
- God has ordained it that way. His will is accomplished through prayer.
- When King Saul was chasing David, at one point the king heard that the shepherd was holed up at Keilah.
- David got wind of Saul's intent to come after him and asked God, "Will Saul come after me here?"

- God said, "Yes."
- David then asked, "Will the men of Keilah deliver me into Saul's hand?"
- God said, "Yes."
- So David escaped before Saul arrived.
- God's will was accomplished through prayer.
- In fact, events were changed because of prayer.
- Oh that we might pray, and find God's will accomplished!
- What should we pray for?

4. That God would provide our daily needs.

- *Daily bread* is symbolic of all our physical needs.
- Notice the prayer is asking God to meet our needs *today*, not tomorrow.
- Matt. 6:34 Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.
- God promises to meet our needs if we will claim His promises.
- Matt. 6:33 Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.
- Go to God in prayer, on the basis of His promise, asking Him to meet your needs — food, clothing, shelter, and other things.
- His desire is to meet your needs, but He wants you to remain dependent upon Him.
- The way we demonstrate our heart of dependence is by asking Him to meet our needs.
- When we do, He delights in meeting them.
- What should we pray for?

5. That God would forgive our sins.

- The word *debts* mentioned in v. 12 is a figurative way of referring to sins, which are like moral or spiritual obligations that bind us.
- Our obligation is to make the debts right by confessing our sins and seeking God's forgiveness.
- Confession is agreeing with God about our sins.
- Thankfully, God has made His children a glorious promise:
- 1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

In vs. 14-15 Jesus puts a condition on being forgiven.

- When we forgive others, God will forgive us.
- But when we refuse to forgive others, God refuses to forgive us.
- What a tragedy that so many children of God live in a continual unforgiving state, simply because they refuse to forgive others.
- May our prayer to God be, "Lord, please forgive me of my sins, and help me to have a tender heart that forgives others."
- What should we pray for?

6. That God would deliver us from sin.

- This appears to be a two-fold request — first, to be kept from an overwhelming temptation to sin.
- Perhaps this is a prayer that we will find God's way of escape amidst temptation and take it (1 Cor. 10:13).
- Second, this is a request to be delivered from habitual sin, finding the freedom that Christ offers.
- According to Rom. 6-8, sin is powerless to rule over believers because of our position in Christ.
- That means we can have victory!

- But not all saints experience victory, so they must ask God for it.
- What should we pray for?

7. That God would be glorified by our life.

- Multitudes of Christians live for self.
- Consequently, they are not glorifying God.
- The primary way that we glorify God is by living obediently, faithfully unto Him.
- Another way is by doing good works, not seeking for others to see our service, but secretly doing things for the Lord.
- Matt. 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

In the broader context of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is teaching the qualifications for inheriting the kingdom.

- In this particular section (6:1-18), He teaches that God rewards three things, if we will do them in secret, and not for public acclaim:
 - 1. Acts of Kindness
 - 2. Occasional Fasting
 - 3. Personal Prayer
- The main point is that God wants us to be rightly motivated in everything we do. Those who are hypocrites, who merely strive to obey outwardly, will not inherit the kingdom.
- Eccl. 12:14 For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.
- What do you do in secret?
- THINK ON THESE THINGS!