



Matthew 6:1-4

Photo Op Faith

2.7.21

Have you ever done something that you considered to be spectacular but no one else saw it?

Judah and I were outside playing basketball a couple of weeks ago. We have a portable hoop set up in our driveway. The ball had gotten away from us and had rolled across the driveway and into our yard. I chased after the ball and thought it would be fun to huck the ball across the yard and driveway and see if I could make it.

The ball went right through the basket! The problem was Judah was not paying attention. No one saw this amazing shot.

There is something natural in us that wants others see and experience something great we do. Kids are a great example of this. Every day when I come home from work, one of my children will want to show me their Lego creation or art project. I actually don't think this has to be seen as pride or selfishness.

Here is the issue for today: When we need recognition for doing good, or as Jesus puts it, "practicing our righteousness," it has a negative effect on your spiritual life.

Your faith is not a photo op to be seen by others.

You know what is a pet peeve of mine? When I am with people, something exciting or funny happens and then someone says, "Stop! Can you recreate that moment? I want to get a picture for Instagram."

Seriously? The moment is over. Even more than that, we don't need to create a photo op for you to put it on your social media.

Even worse is when I am asked to create a picture of something that never happened!

The same is true about how you practice your faith. Our pride can cause us to want others to see us as holy and righteous. Look at how good I am at praying. Look at how well I know the Bible. Look at how I never miss church. Look how I give to the church.

Jesus is going to address the motives behind our actions in the coming weeks. Why do we do what we do? Let's read Matthew 6:1-4. We are one third of the way through the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus turns his at-



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tention to what motivates our religious activity.

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.

Opening Statement

Verse 1 opens with the command, "Beware". It's a present imperative meaning constant vigilance. Always be aware of your heart when other people see you "practicing your righteousness." There is certainly a public part of our faith.

Jesus is going to address three pillars of the Jewish faith in the coming verses. We will look at them over the next three weeks. First, in the passage we just read, Jesus talks about giving to those in need. Then he speaks of prayer and finally, fasting.

In all three instances, Jesus is addressing the motives behind the external action. In essence Jesus is saying, "Don't practice your faith with fanfare or show."

The issue is not if someone sees you practicing your faith, it's if being seen is your motive. Did you notice those seven little words, "...in order to be seen by them."

Your faith is not a photo-op for your own self promotion. We will make this same point for the next three weeks:
Be aware of your motives.

This is actually really hard. It is almost impossible to practice your faith without wondering what others are thinking. It's really hard not to let the opinion of others influence how I practice my faith.

For example, in a worship service you feel uncomfortable singing – because you are like me and can't carry a tune. Or an inverse is possible and you could join the worship team so that everyone can praise your good singing voice. Jesus isn't saying to not to sing up front or even that you need to sing louder in the congregation – the issue is the motive of your heart.

A couple of months ago we had a worship night for college students here. I was just part of the crowd singing. Then one of our students who takes pictures at events came around to snap a picture of me. You know what I did? I closed my eyes and threw my hands up.

Epic failure.

A couple of weeks ago, Cody preached on being salt and light. We are told to let our good deeds be seen by others. At first glance this might seem like a contradiction to the call to secrecy in Matthew 6.

Remember, the issue at play is the motives of your heart matter. Let's say it another way. **You can practice your faith in front of people but not for people.**

Commentator A.B. Bruce said, "Show when tempted to hide. Hide when tempted to show."

This helps me put the call to let my light shine and the call to secrecy in perspective.

Let's focus on the topic Jesus brings up in verses 2-4. You might be tempted to show off when you are giving your money to someone in need.

Giving to those in need

I want you to see the assumption, command, and reward of Jesus in these verses. First, notice that verse two opens with, "When you give..."

There is an assumption: You give to those in need.

Giving to those in need was vital to society. Jews took care of those who were in need. There wasn't a welfare system – no food stamps, no government help for housing. There is no OHP for those who couldn't afford healthcare. A beggar would sit at the city gates and collect what he needed for the day. He might be crippled and unable to work, he might be blind or deaf – and people provided for them. Giving was an assumed practice of the Jewish community.

I don't think this is an assumption we can make today – that all of you give to those in need. So I think we need to begin by calling each of us to give to those in need.

Let me set this up, because whenever we talk about money in church, it's always a little awkward and uncomfortable for people. But Jesus talks a lot about money. One in 10 verses in the New Testament is about money. Twenty-five percent of all of Jesus' teaching deals with money. Jesus cares a lot about how we spend our money.

Now, just so we are all clear: there are two kinds of giving in the New Testament. There is giving to the church and then there is giving to those in need. In our world today, people might support many other good causes as well.

Let's be clear from the beginning. God doesn't need your money to do anything.

Generosity is not something God wants from you; it is something God wants for you. Paul makes this clear in Philippians 4:10-20.

First, let's briefly describe **giving to the church**.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 9, we see Paul describe the need to give financially to the work of the church. Specifically in 1 Corinthians 9:11 it says,

¹¹ If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

If the church has poured into you spiritually, you should give back materially. *To be clear: I don't make more money if you give more. I don't work on commission.*

I do want you to see that there is clear teaching in the Bible: We give to the church – this is a regular, structured giving. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9:7, "Each person should give and you should determine in your heart what it should be."

Matthew 6:1-4 isn't really about giving to the church, it's about **giving to those in need**. This is the spontaneous, unstructured giving to those in need. It's giving beyond supporting the local church.

When you see a need and you have the ability to meet that need – you do it.

Grant Avenue is great at this! I think of the Thanksgiving food boxes that you provided for a middle school in town. I can think of how you provide for one another in so many other ways.

Okay, so we have our assumption: you give to those in need. Now here's the command.

The command: Give in such a way that God gets the attention.

It's not just that you do the right things, it's that you do the right things for the right reasons. It's a question of motives: Do I want the attention or am I willing to do this in secret?

There are two layers to this. First, don't draw attention to yourself. Jesus says, "Don't sound a trumpet when you give." Jesus calls people who do this hypocrites. The point is to not claim to care about those in need, if all you want is the attention. You really care about yourself.

Second, don't celebrate yourself. Jesus says, "Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." It's possible that the reason you are giving to those in need is because now you feel better about yourself.

Our motives matter.

I'm reminded of traveling to Peru many times with a mission team from our church. We would spend the week working in an orphanage in the capital city of Lima. There were over 1,000 children in the orphanage. The children ranged from newborns to 18 year olds. It was always a great week of ministry as we served the children and helped around the orphanage.

It seemed like each year that we were there another mission team would show up for a couple of hours one afternoon.

For the sake of this illustration, let me paint you a picture of how we did ministry in the orphanage. We would sleep on the ground in a small room that was given to us. There was rarely running water and sometimes there was electricity available to us. We basically survived on peanut butter and jelly all week. When the sun came up, we were awake and began helping cook in the kitchen, repairing parts of the orphanage that had broken or teaching about Jesus in the school. Usually by 11pm we would be done with our day.

So, imagine when a mission team arrives at 2pm in the afternoon after sleeping in their hotel. They come into the orphanage with their cameras out. They don't want to miss an opportunity to document the conditions at the orphanage.

They pull out bags of candy and the kids come running.

I remember talking with one of the ladies who faithfully worked in this orphanage for years. She was angry. This was a common occurrence. She shared how these Americans didn't know what they are doing, they just want a picture to show off back home. They were giving all this sugar to kids – but then would leave and she would be left having to deal with them.

It was true. I watched as the cell phones came out for selfies with orphan children. It made me wonder, "*What is their motive?*"

This is what Jesus is saying. Your giving to those in need is not a photo op to show off your faith.

Last part, there is a reward.

Reward: You will receive a reward, either from men or God.

The reward we received from man is temporary and short-lived. You get a "Congratulations!" or a "Wow, you are so generous." Maybe it is a brick on the ground in your honor.

This is what Jesus is saying, "If you give to the needy to get the praise of man, than that is exactly what your reward will be."

But there is a reward from God. That is better motivation! But what are we to make at getting a reward for giving to the needy? Does it not seem wrong to desire a reward?

I'm reminded of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus in Matthew 19. This man asks how to get into Heaven and Jesus tells him to sell everything. He can't do it and walks away sad. Jesus then makes a statement that it is "hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew 19:23)

I want to highlight Peter's response in verse 27, "See, we have left everything to follow you, what then will we have?"

Peter is concerned about his reward for following Jesus.

Jesus replies in verse 28:

28 Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. **29** And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

Peter desires a reward and Jesus says he will get it. Jesus doesn't say, "How dare you desire a reward?!" But what are the rewards?

First, a need is met and there is a reward in that. This person who was hungry isn't hungry any more.

Second, there is joy in giving. Jesus is saying, "It is better to give than to receive."

Third, there is a heavenly reward. I don't know what that is or how to understand it. But I am confident that is what we see in the text.

Conclusion

Our God is a giving God. We are to follow his example. It's assumed that you will give to those in need. But Jesus isn't only concerned about the outward act, he is concerned about the motives of your heart.

Why do you practice your faith? For the praise of man or God?

Small Group Discussion Guide

Opening Questions (pick one or two to answer as a group)

1. Share a time you did something unexpected and responded by saying, "Did you see that!?!?"
2. Have you ever seen someone give or help someone in need for selfish motives?
3. What are practical ways the church can give to those in need today?

Main Points:

Acts of righteousness

- Be aware of your motives
- You can practice your faith in front of people but not for people.

Three parts of Jesus Instruction

Assumption: You give to those in need.

Command: Give in such a way that God gets the attention

Reward: You will receive an award, either from men or God

Discussion Questions

1. What was the specific motive Jesus warns against in verse 1?
2. Make a list of religious activities that you might participate in for the wrong reasons.
3. Pastor Bryan mentioned it is almost impossible to practice your faith without wondering what others are thinking. He gave examples of worship and prayer. How have you seen this to be true in your life?
4. How do you feel when money is talked about at church?
5. Regarding giving, if you do not have the right motive, should you still give?
6. What level of priority should the church put on giving to those in need?
7. How can you know when you are acting to be seen by others and when you are letting your light shine before others (Matt 5:16)?
8. Does God want you to be motivated by reward in heaven?
9. Should all of your giving be done in secret? Why or why not?