April 17, 2016

“The Heart of Giving”

Matthew 6:1-4

**FCF**: Motivations in giving to others

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) Christ calls us to give to others.

(magnet) But we must do so in the right way.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Let’s talk about motives. Why do we do the things that we do – even good things? Case in point, helping the little old lady across the street. Why would we do that? Perhaps out of concern for her physical safety. Sure. Or maybe because she reminds you of your late granny and you feel guilty about the way you had treated her. Perhaps you help the old lady because of a pretty young lady standing nearby that you want to impress. Or maybe the old lady is rich.

Why do we do the things that we do – even good things? Why would we help another person, give of ourselves toward their need? Jesus says we need to examine our hearts here.

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Matthew 6:1-4

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

So, where are we? We are post the post-Easter sermon series, returning to the series in Matthew’s Gospel, moving through the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has set before us the marks of Christian character in the Beatitudes, the reality of Christian influence as salt and light, and then the depth of Christian righteousness with the rest of chapter five. That theme continues here in chapter six but with a shift of focus from moral righteousness to religious righteousness. That is, from actions and attitudes to one another to external acts of devotion to God. And here’s the thing. Both are necessary and important. Neither is optional or according to our preference.

Both of these – the moral and the religious – are natural and expected. Jesus tells us that we will know a tree by its fruit. Or, in the case of our house, you will know a yard by its weeds.

Jesus calls us to these external acts of devotion to God, to “practice (our) righteousness before (others)” – which includes giving to others. That said, we must do this in the right way. What does that mean? To get at this, we’re going to look at three things. First, the assumption behind the instruction. Second, the way of the hypocrite. And, finally, the way of the disciple.

1. **THE ASSUMPTION BEHIND THE INSTRUCTION**

So, first, what’s the assumption behind the instruction here? What’s driving it?

1. *Historical Practice*

We need to understand that almsgiving was a practice in Judaism with deep roots.

1. Essential

It was something deemed essential, one of the most sacred duties. In fact, the Hebrew word for “righteousness” was the same for “almsgiving” – acts of mercy, giving to those in need.

1. Rationale

And the rationale for such a devotion to such giving was that it was intended to be a grateful response to God for His care. This is why we see the Old Testament prophets condemn a lack of such generous care of the poor. For it indicated a coldness of heart to both neighbor and to God.

1. *Continued Practice*

How then will Jesus speak of such a practice? Clearly, it is not to end but to continue.

1. Jesus’ wording

Note what He says. Not “If you give to the needy…” but “When you give to the needy…”

1. Rationale

It’s still right and appropriate. In fact, with Jesus, it’s even more so (READ 2 Corinthians 8:9).

So that’s the assumption behind the instruction. That of generous giving to others.

*Application:*

It’s a basic essential part of the Christian life. Since God is a merciful and generous God, His people should be merciful and generous people. In the teaching that then follows, this sort of lifestyle is assumed. Such acts are not being questioned. It’s the motives behind the acts.

C. S. Lewis wrote this in his classic work, Mere Christianity (READ quote):

Charity – giving to the poor – is an essential part of Christian morality…I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditures on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc. is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little.

If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditures excludes them.

Wise and tough words. Here’s the question. Is that true of us? If an audit was being done of our financial accounts, would an examiner see this? What would they be compelled to report?

Christ calls us to give to meet the needs of others. But we must do this in the right way.

1. **THE WAY OF THE HYPOCRITE**

Which takes us to these two ways, the first being the hypocrite (READ Matthew 6:1-2).

1. *The Reason*

What’s the reason for this path? What’s going on beneath the surface?

1. What they are

The answer begins with what they are – hypocrites. Originally, the word referred to actors who wore masks in playing a part, performing and pretending to be something they were not.

1. What they want

And Jesus describes them as people wanting to be seen and noticed, to be admired and praised.

1. *The Pattern*

So, that’s the reason for their actions. What’s the pattern? How does it play out?

1. The metaphor

He uses this memorable metaphor of sounding a trumpet in the synagogues and in the streets.

1. The meaning

Meaning that they are attracting attention to what they’re doing. Now, please note that Jesus is not saying it’s wrong to give and to be seen. He’s saying it’s wrong to do it in order to be seen.

1. *The Result*

So we have the reason and the pattern. And what is the result? (READ Matthew 6:2b)

1. The metaphor

Jesus uses an image from the financial world – paid in full, completed with issuance of a receipt.

1. The meaning

Meaning that’s it. You wanted the praise of men. That’s what you’ll get. And no more.

This is Jesus’ description of the way of the hypocrite. And it’s a warning to us.

*Illustration:*

People have a way of calling attention to what they’ve given. In the ancient world, the wealthy paid to have the streets paved with their names inscribed on visible stones. Today, the wealthy give money to a community, a hospital, or a school and get a building named for them. Or perhaps it’s a brick on a walkway. Or our name on some signage connected to an event.

*Application:*

Jesus is saying, “*Do not give for the sake of your popularity or vanity but rather true charity. Do not give in order to satisfy your need. Give in order to satisfy someone else’s need*.”

Clearly, Jesus calls us to give to others. That said, we must do so in the right way.

1. **THE WAY OF THE DISCIPLE**

Now, in contrast to all that, we have then the way of the disciple (READ Matthew 6:3-4).

1. *The Reason*

What’s the reason for this path? What’s going on beneath the surface here?

1. What we are

Again, the answer has to do with what we are. We are disciples, followers of Jesus. But, tied to that, reference is made here to our Father. Which is a reminder that we are His children as well.

1. What we want

Which is to say we want to walk in His ways. We want to live in a way that pleases Him – knowing all the while that we have His pleasure already. That’s the reason for our giving.

1. *The Pattern*

But what is the pattern? What does such giving look like in contrast to the hypocrite?

1. The metaphor

Here Jesus uses the metaphor of the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing.

1. The meaning

Which is to say that our giving is hidden from ourselves. We are not self-conscious about it. We are not congratulating ourselves. It’s hidden from ourselves and so it’s hidden from others. We don’t dwell on it which then keeps us from doing things to encourage anyone else to dwell on it.

Now, I should add here that this is not a contradiction to what Jesus said earlier (READ Matthew 5:16). Jesus is addressing two different issues, two different temptations. A. B. Bruce put it this way (READ quote) – we are to “*show when tempted to hide*” and to “*hide when tempted to show*.” The main thing, the chief goal in it all, is that the glory would go to God and not to us.

1. *The Result*

So, we have the reason and pattern for the disciple. The result? (READ Matthew 6:4b)

1. The reward – how possible

Keep in mind that such a reward is not a payment in any way. How then is it possible? God’s generosity is that of a Father. The reward comes not from our merit but from His mercy. It comes not from our deserving but His delighting. He simply desires to lavish good things on us.

1. The reward – possibilities

That’s what makes such rewards possible. What might such possible rewards be in this context? The simple delight in serving others. The joy of being used by God to meet others’ needs.

This is Jesus’ description of the way of the disciple. And it is an invitation to us.

*Illustration:*

Back to the rewards. This isn’t like ceremony where the reward for sacrifice of time and energy is a trophy that sits on a shelf. Such a reward is disconnected from the work. This is different. His rewards are like hours of practice with a musical instrument rewarded with getting better. Or time and attention put into a relationship rewarded with growing trust and intimacy.

*Application:*

But what about giving secretly? How can we grow in this? How can we give in a way that is hidden from ourselves and others? Let me make just some simple suggestions. Let’s say you have a plaque or award from some charitable organization. Or a souvenir of some kind from a mission trip. Or a number at the bottom of a giving statement. How will you regard all that?

Don’t take pride in any of it. Don’t gloat or congratulate yourself. Instead, call to mind how the Lord made that possible. And then continually give thanks – every time your eyes fall on that object – give thanks for that little part He allowed you to play in that much larger story.

Clearly, Jesus calls us to give to others. That said, we must do so in the right way.

**CONCLUSION:**

So, we have the way of the hypocrite and the way of the disciple with regard to giving to others. But how do we avoid the one and walk in the other? Well, we could surely say that the way to avoid hypocrisy in giving is not to cease giving. Rather, it’s to grow in giving secretly.

But there’s more to say than that. To avoid the way of the hypocrite and to walk in the way of the disciple, we need to keep our eyes on Jesus, the One who speaks these words and who’s given us so much already. Then it becomes as natural as breathing out after breathing in.

We read a quote from C. S. Lewis earlier. It’s worth knowing something of the man. As Lewis’ books became popular, large royalties poured in. But instead of upgrading his lifestyle, Lewis decided to maintain his current standard of living and to give the rest away. As he got paid for The Screwtape Letters and then later BBC radio broadcasts, he had the monies sent to a Clergy Widows fund. The problem was that, after having given all that money away, he learned he still owed taxes on it. For all his other strengths, Lewis was never very good at math.

Fortunately, his good friend and lawyer Owen Barfield set up a charitable trust for him. From then on, two-thirds of Lewis’ royalties went into trust and were distributed anonymously to many people – those in poverty, clergy widows, seminary students, churches, other ministries. Lewis went to great lengths to make sure his name would never be tied to any of the gifts.

Related to all this, Lewis’ gardener, Fred Paxton, discovered during the reading of Lewis’ will that he was bequeathed only 100 pounds. Paxton remarked (READ quote), “*Werl, it won’t take me far, wull it?*” But then he added, “*Mr. Jack, ‘e never ‘ad no idea of money. ‘Is mind was always set on ‘igher things*.” Indeed it was. Not just in his writings but in his whole life.

We too need to have our minds on higher things – on what we are, on why we give, and how. Jesus calls us to these external acts of devotion to God – which includes giving to others. That said, we must do this in the right way. And that right way has its roots in Jesus Himself.

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) Christ calls us to give to others.

(magnet) But we must do so in the right way.