

THE GIVING THAT GOD BLESSES

Matthew 6:1-4

Intro: Today we move into a new section of the Sermon on the Mount.

We can call this the third. In the first we had the Beatitudes which are in chapter 1, verse 1, down to verse 16.

This first section is followed by four verses (17 through 20) in which the Lord really stated His purpose, or theme, for what would follow to the end of the Sermon in chapter 7, and it is most clearly stated in verse 20.

(Read.)

This verse indicates that what follows is not only a declaration of the truth, but also that our Lord was pointing out some of the failures of the scribes and Pharisees. So the Lord was indicating that if they followed the instruction of the scribes and Pharisees, as well as the example of their lives, then they could never hope to be saved.

This led our Lord to the second section which we have just completed: the remainder of chapter 1 – verses 17 through 48. In those verses we have seen that there are six, clearly marked divisions. Each one is introduced by the Lord saying, “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time,” or something very similar to that, and then He followed whatever quotation He made with, “But I say unto you.” The verse divisions for this part of the message which I have already given you are:

- 1) Vv. 21-26.
- 2) Vv. 27-30.
- 3) Vv. 31-32.
- 4) Vv. 33-37.
- 5) Vv. 38-42.
- 6) Vv. 43-48, the last verse giving us the special appeal that the Lord made at the conclusion of that section.

As we move into chapter 6 the criticism of the scribes and Pharisees continued. The Lord did not mention them again as He had done in chapter 5, verse 10, but He repeated the word “hypocrites” over and over. See vv. 2, 5, and 16. And this is the word that the Lord used to describe the scribes and Pharisees *seven times* in Matthew 23 where we have the Lord’s repeated denunciations of the religious leaders of the Jews.

Now just in case there may be some of you who do not know the basic idea in the word *hypocrite*, it was a word used by both Greeks and Romans

for an actor on the stage. And actors usually wore huge masks so that you could not identify the real person while they were on stage, acting a particular part. And so eventually this word was used for a person who was pretending to be something, or someone, which he was not. And that is the way it is used by our Lord in the verses we are coming to in chapter 6. The scribes and Pharisees sought to make people think that they were more pious than they really were. They were like actors on a stage. They were pretending to be better than they were. They probably knew those words of the Lord to Samuel in 1 Sam. 16:7, but they had never made the application to themselves. I am referring to what the Lord said when Samuel was looking at Eliab, the son of Jesse, thinking that he surely must be the new king of Israel. I am referring to the Lord's words, "The Lord seeth not as man teeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7b). It is relatively easy for us to deceive each other, and even for us to deceive ourselves, *but no one can deceive the Lord!* And we had better not try!

Here again, we probably all have been guilty of some form of hypocrisy at one time or another, but it certainly is despicable in the sight of the Lord. If we are pretending to be more devoted to the Lord than we really are, or pretending to be more obedient to the Lord than we really are, we are hypocrites! We are only acting a part, but it is not a true indication of what we really are. When Saul went to the witch of Endor to find out what he should do about the Philistines, the Word tells us that "Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment." He was acting like he was not the king, and so he was a hypocrite, which he actually was!

Hypocrisy is undoubtedly one of the most common of human sins. And it is often very prevalent among people who claim to be Christians. And the more spiritual an activity is, the greater the danger that we will be hypocritical. Our Lord here mentioned three areas where the scribes and Pharisees had been hypocritical:

- 1) In almsgiving.
- 2) In prayer.
- 3) In fasting.

Today we are going to consider almsgiving. But before we get to that, let us look at the first verse of chapter 6. (Read.)

This is:

I. THE INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER SIX (Matt. 6:1).

There is a textual problem concerning the word "alms." There is very

strong evidence from many good MSS, that the word should be *righteousness*. This would be perfectly consistent with the emphasis in the Sermon on the Mount.

You will remember that in 5:20 the Lord was speaking of “righteousness.” (Read.)

And “righteousness” fits into what the Lord was about to say better than “alms.” And I say that because there were three righteous works which the Lord was going to mention:

- 1) Almsgiving.
- 2) Prayer.
- 3) Fasting.

These are all to be righteous works, and we all should know that they can be done, not in a righteous way, but in a very unrighteous way. And they become unacceptable to God if we do them *to be seen of men*. If we are especially concerned that people know what we are doing, then our main concern is not with God. And the result is that we will not be rewarded by our “Father which is in heaven.” God rewards us only for that which is done for His glory.

I want you to notice that the Lord was teaching here that we need to be motivated by a desire for rewards, rewards from God, not from men – rewards for pleasing God, not for pleasing men. It is both an indication of our ignorance and also of our false humility for us to say that we are not interested in rewards as Christians. If we are not interested in rewards, we had better get interested. This is not so we can boast about our rewards when we stand before the Lord, but so we can know that we have spent our time here on earth seeking to glorify the Lord. What all of this means about rewards, I cannot say. But I can say that we need to live in such a way that we will get rewards.

Our Lord mentioned rewards in verses 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 16,18. So they have to be very important, and they should be our main objective in all that we do.

Now the verse is a warning. It begins both in the Greek and in the English with the verb, “Take heed.” It means that we should be extremely careful, to exercise the greatest caution, that we do not perform acts of righteousness to be seen of men. We are not even to do it “before men,” that is, to wait until we are sure that people are watching. People may at times see what we do, but we are to be completely happy if no man ever finds out what we have done because it should be that our main purpose is to please the Lord. If we want men to praise us, then that will be the only reward

that we will ever get.

So you can see that the Lord was speaking here about the condition of our hearts.

Matthew Henry mentioned that our Lord's warning against hypocrisy was an indication that *hypocrisy is a sin!* And then he added this in his comments on our text, Matthew 6:1-4;

1. We are in great danger of; it is a subtle sin; vain-glory insinuates itself into what we do ere we are aware. The disciples would be tempted to it by the power they had to do many wondrous works, and their living with some that admired them and others that despised them, both which are temptations to covet to make a fair show in the flesh.

2. It is a sin we are in great danger by. Take heed of hypocrisy, for if it reign in you, it will ruin you. It is the dead fly that spoils the whole box of precious ointment.

In Luke 12:1 we learn that our Lord called hypocrisy the leaven of the Pharisees. This means that they were teaching it by their own practices, and that it would permeate a person's whole being once they were infected by it. We all are inclined toward it by nature, but its results can be truly devastating when it is allowed to take over in our hearts.

What the Apostle Paul told the Galatians about preaching the Gospel, applies here to what our Lord was saying. I am speaking of Gal. 1:10:

For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men?
for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.

And so what the Lord said in this first verse applies equally to the giving of alms, and prayer, and fasting. Now let us turn our attention to:

II. ALMSGIVING (Matt. 6:2-4).

This was also called by our Lord, *doing their alms*. And it is implied that all of the Lord's people will feel this is a major responsibility toward the Lord because we are the Lord's people. *But what does it mean, to give alms, or to do our alms?*

It is really showing mercy to the poor. If you could see the word *alms* in Greek, you would see that it is formed with the Greek word for mercy as a part of it. So it means giving to the poor.

All of us who know the Lord, know that we have been the recipients of God's mercy in salvation. And so it is a part of showing our love for the Lord that we show mercy upon others – even upon our enemies as the Lord had just been saying at the end of chapter 5.

Now the first point that the Lord made about almsgiving was:

A. What they were not to do (Matt. 6:2).

Blowing a trumpet can be taken either literally, or figuratively. Some people make so much of what they give that it is just like blowing a trumpet so that everyone will notice what they are doing. And it makes little difference whether it is in the privacy of the synagogue, or publicly in the streets. They want others to notice what they are doing, and usually how much they are giving. Our Lord said that this is what hypocrites do. What is given is certainly not to be given foolishly. And it is important for us to know that the need is genuine before we give. But when the gift is made, the giver should do it "in secret." The Lord may have mentioned the synagogue because gifts could be made to synagogue to be distributed through that channel, just as we can give through our churches today.

The hypocrite gets paid in full by the applause of men, but he has no prospect at all of any future reward. One commentator wrote that all of the blessing that a child of God gets in this life for righteous acts that he has done, are only partial payments. The full payment awaits the day when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and receive a full reward.

But the second part is equally important:

B. How they were to give (Matt. 6:3-4).

"Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." This means that we are to keep to ourselves what we have done in the way of giving. But even with ourselves we are not to dwell in our own hearts on what we have done. We do what we can, and are thankful that God has enabled us to do it, but then we are to forget what we have done. We are to be like those the Lord referred to at the time of the judgment of the nations. We find the account in Matt. 25:31-40:

31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep

from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

The work is to be done in secret; the reward will be openly, if not here, then certainly in heaven when we see how God has used us for His own glory.

Concl: Now there are certainly some important lessons for all of us in a passage like this, even as short as it is.

The first is that we need to avoid seeking our own glory. There is within our hearts a subtle desire to have the credit for whatever we do, and we often are offended if we are not recognized. This is nothing but selfish pride. And such an attitude has no place in the hearts of those of us who profess Christ as our Savior, the One Who “humbled Himself, and became obedient, even to the death of the Cross.” And the reward of the Father followed His death in that He was exalted and given a Name which is above every name, that every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father.’

Secondly, we need to guard against hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is the fruit of pride when we try to make more of ourselves than there really is. The Lord denounced the scribes and Pharisees in theses words:

27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful out-

ward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity (Matt. 23:27-28).

Hypocrisy is sin, but it breeds many other sins, and so we need to be careful about any and every tendency to make it appear that we are better than we are.

Third, let us all recognize that the greatest safeguard we have against the pride that leads to hypocrisy, is to cultivate the closest possible relationship with our Lord. There was not the slightest evidence of these or any other sins in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the more we seek to be like Him, the stronger will become our tendency to tolerate those things which someday will be rooted out of our lives altogether. Let us not try to cover up our sins, but confess and forsake them. As we do this, we are promised more and more of the mercy of God. Cf. Prov. 28:13.

And then let us thank the Lord for the opportunities we have to be a blessing and a help to others. And it is God Himself Who gives us the means to help others. What we can give is what He has given to us, and what He has given us is still really His, and is to be used for His glory. Second only to loving God, we need to love our neighbors. We can't help everyone we would like to help, but we can help some, and this we should do.

Finally, let us remember that we are to live to glorify God, and His dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And this comes down to whatever we eat, or drink, or whatever we do. And we can't glorify the Lord if we are seeking to exalt ourselves. That great benediction which the Apostle Paul pronounced on the Ephesians is one in which we see that God is able not only to make us what we are not able to be, but He also keeps us from continuing to do what is displeasing to Him. I am referring to Eph. 3:20-21:

20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.