

**OUR FATHER WHO SEES IN SECRET**

Matthew 6:1-6

Intro: Six times in three verses in Matthew 6 our Lord used the words, “in secret.” Cf. verses 4, 6, and 18. (Read them.) These are very unusual statements, and they are not found in either Mark, or Luke, or John. You will notice that they have to do with giving alms and with praying. Our Lord said first in verse 4 that we must give our alms in secret, and then He added that that is what our Father sees, *i.e.*, *what is done in secret*. But then in verse our Lord said that we are to “pray to thy Father which is in secret,” and then He added, “and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee.” The word “openly” is not in the Greek text, either in verse 4, or verse 6, or verse 18. Evidently our translators added the word “openly” thinking that if we do things “in secret” in order to please the Lord, that He would reward us “openly.” But we know that is not necessarily true. There are many things that the people of God have done down through the years of time that have never been made known. The fact that we will be rewarded is a promise made to us, but it may be that the reward will not come until we stand before the judgment seat of Christ where Paul said “every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10) – “bad” meaning, not *evil*, but *worthless*. It can mean *evil*, but here it means *flawed, worthless*.

In 1 Cor. 2 Paul had discussed service we render to the Lord, and this is what he had to say:

10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

The Lord said that we can build with “gold, silver, precious stones,” or with “wood, hay, or stubble.” What happens which you put the fire to gold, silver, or precious stones”? There is a purifying process that takes place. What happens when you put “wood” in the fire? It burns up the wood. What happens when you put “hay” in the fire? It is gone. And the same is true of “stubble.” Therefore, we need to be careful as to how and with what we serve the Lord, and that we are building upon the one and only foundation upon which our works will remain. Jesus Christ is that foundation.

Now in dealing with the text here in Matthew 6:1 and 2 I want to point out to you that the word translated “alms” in verse 1 is both different and more comprehensive than the word translated “alms” in verse 2. The best Greek texts seem to indicate that the word our Lord used in verse 1 was the word “righteousness,” by which he meant all of the righteous things that a child of God does in relation to his heavenly Father. The word in verse 2 which is translated “alms” is more properly translated “alms.”

Therefore, it seems that the word “righteousness” in verse 1 is used to mean *righteous deeds*, a title for the three things that our Lord mentioned in the verses I have pointed out to you. In verse 2 it is “alms.” In verse 4 it is prayer. And in verse 18, actually verses 16 through 18, it is fasting.

And so what we have is the Lord mentioning in this section the righteous deeds, or you could call them works, which the people of God engage in, which are giving, praying, and fasting. Verse 1, then, is a warning about all three: almsgiving, praying, and fasting. All three are expected of the people of God. But here the time is not specified for either of them. Our Lord said about almsgiving in verse 2, “when thou doest thine alms.” In verse 5, “And when thou prayest.” And in verse 16, “when ye fast.”

And so I am going to give verse 1 the title:

### **I. THE LORD’S GENERAL WARNING (Matt. 6:1).**

This applies to all that we do as the Lord’s people. The Lord had said in Matt. 5:20,

20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The Lord was saying here that the scribes and Pharisees as a whole, even

though they were looked upon as the spiritual leaders of the people of Israel – for the greater part were not saved! They gave money. They prayed. And they fasted. But they were not doing it as unto the Lord. They were not doing it to please the Lord. They were doing it *to be seen of men*, to have the praise of men, and to have men think of them as very devoted to God. A. T. Robertson pointed out in his commentary on this verse that the Greek word which is translated, “to be seen,” is the word from which we get our English word, *theatrical*, which in turn means a “spectacular performance.” I have already told you that the Greek word translated “hypocrite” is the Greek word for an actor. And this is one reason I am against drama for portraying the Christian message. The scribes and Pharisees put on a great act before people every day, but that is all that it was, just a big show! And that is the very thing that the Lord was sounding a warning against here at this point in His Sermon on the Mount. *In the Christian life we are not to do what we do to impress people, or to have their praise. We are to do what we do in our relationship to God to please Him, and if anything, to keep people from finding out how much we give, or how much we pray, or how often we fast.* If you and I give, or pray, or read our Bibles, or go to church, or fast, so that people will congratulate us, that is our reward. And it may be that if we are here this morning just so people will think well of us, that we won’t be in heaven at all.

I heard yesterday on the news that churches were one of the main groups behind the demonstration against the war in Iraq. Where did those churches get the idea that that was their mission in Portland? The Bible talks about being submissive to our leaders, and praying for them, but our President was being cursed by most people, and undoubtedly some of the outcry against our President came from ministers who were involved in the demonstration. What kind of an idea are we giving the people of the world as to what the Christian message is? The scribes and Pharisees are not the only hypocrites that have appeared before the world who carry a religious title.

But now let me move on to the first two points the Lord made regarding what is expected of a child of God. And this is:

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

In the days when the Lord Jesus was here on earth, there were many, many poor people. With some they were in poverty because they were

Christians. There was a lot of persecution, for example, in Jerusalem, against those who were trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin. And so collections were made by churches in other places throughout the Empire, and those collections were sent to the believers in Jerusalem.

But our Lord assumes by what He said in these verses, that a true believer is going to want to honor the Lord with his money, and he will give it to help the needy, to support the Lord's work and the Lord's servants. There were some ladies who are mentioned in the Gospels who helped to support the Lord Jesus Christ while He was here on earth.

But herein lies a great danger, and I am afraid that the church has contributed to this danger by the way people have been asked to make pledges of support for the Lord's work. And then churches have been named after them. Or people themselves have talked about how much they have given to this church, or that school, or that mission.

How did the scribes and Pharisees give? Was the Lord speaking of actual practice when He spoke of the blowing of trumpets and what the scribes and Pharisees were doing publicly in the synagogues, and even in the streets, so make sure that people knew what they were doing. But why? The Lord said that it was "that they may have glory of men." Well, if that is why they did it, then when men honored them and praised them for what they were doing, *they had their reward, and that was all that they were going to get!*

What did the Lord tell His disciples that they should do? How should they give? He told them in verse 3 that they ought to be so quiet about it that their left hand would not know what their right hand was doing. This apparently was a proverbial expression among the Jews where they spoke of not letting one member of your body know what another member was doing. Now I am left handed, and so for me it would mean that I should not let my right hand know what my left hand was doing. That makes giving a top secret matter!

When a person gives just because they love the Lord, trying to keep others from knowing how much he may give, that is the kind of giving that will be reward in heaven, and there may be some evidence of it even in a believer's life here on earth. If the Lord sees it, and He knows why we are giving, because we love Him and His work and His people, that ought

to be enough for us. May the Lord make us content to wait until we stand before the judgment seat of Christ before we get the rewards that He has for us. I don't know what the rewards will be, but we can be sure that they will be worth waiting for. If they are crowns, we will have something to lay at His feet.

The second thing that the Lord mentioned as being vital in the life of a Christians, is:

### **III. PRAYER (Matt. 6:5-6).**

Actually what He had to say about prayer goes down to verse 15, but I am just going to deal with verses 5 and 6 today.

A person who claims to be a Christian, but who does not pray, is not telling the truth about himself. A person who is a Christian will pray, and pray consistently. After the Lord struck down Saul of Tarsus as he was on his way to Damascus to arrest men and women who had trusted Christ, the Lord spoke to a believer by the name of Ananias about going to see Saul, and to put his hand on him that he might receive his sight. The Lord told Ananias the street where he was to go, and the name of the man in whose house Saul was staying. But then the Lord said this about Saul, "Behold, he prayeth."

Saul of Tarsus was a Pharisee, and a very strict one. He followed all of the rules. I think I can honestly say that previously he loved to pray standing in the synagogues, or even on the street corners, so that people could see him praying. And he did both because he wanted people to see him. But now he was in a house, and Ananias would not have known where to find him if the Lord had not given him the street and the name of the man who lived on that street. He was in a house, not out on the street, and not even in a synagogue. But he was praying, really praying. Before he had said prayers in order to impress the people. But now he was calling upon God. The Lord said that he was really praying. Paul was getting his first lesson about where to pray.

Look at what the Lord Jesus said in verse 6, and I hope that we will all take his words to heart. Let me read verse 6 to you again. This is very wonderful truth. (Read v. 6.)

Do you have a closet? The word our Lord used was a reference to a room

which was usually on the ground floor of their homes in those day, which was a place where a person could go and have privacy, away from everyone else. A closet to us is a place where we keep our clothes, and usually closets are so full that we can hardly get into them. The Lord was not talking about that. He meant that you and I ought to have some special place where we can go, be by ourselves, to pray. And yet we are not alone. The Lord is with us. He is in secret, and He knows when we are there too. He sees us, and listens to us, and that is where we find the strength in the Lord and in His Word, so that our lives will bear a public, yet silent witness, that we have been with the Lord. The Lord is in secret. That is where you and I will find Him.

Where do you and I really find the Lord? Do you remember how Psalm 91 begins?

1 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

2 I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust.

But we are not always at home, are we? This week some of our people will probably be away during this Spring Break from the schools. We can take a break from school, and we can take breaks from our work, *but we should never take a break from the Lord*. Do you remember the story of Jacob in the OT, how he had to get away from his home because his brother Esau had vowed that he would kill him because Jacob had stolen the blessing from him? That first night away from home he must have felt very lonesome. He was out in the country. He took some stones for his pillow, and he went to sleep. It was in the days before the Scriptures were completed, in fact, they were not written at all. God spoke to him in a dream. He spoke to Jacob about the promise that He had made with Jacob's grandfather Abraham, a promise of which Jacob was also the heir. And then the Lord said this to Jacob:

15 And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither though goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of (Gen. 28:15).

And then do you remember what Jacob said when he woke up the next morning? Let me read to you what he said:

16 And Jacob awaked out of sleep, and he said, surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.

17 And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This

is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. The Lord had a lot to do in Jacob's heart, but the Lord made a closet for Jacob out under the stars, and to Jacob it became Bethel, which means *the house of God*, and to him, "the gate of heaven."

**Concl:** Every child of God needs a closet, a place where he can be with the Lord each day. But it is wonderful that often when we are away from home, the Lord gives us a different closet, a place where He can meet with us, and we with Him. You and I find him not so much in the rush and busy-ness of life, but in the quiet place where He is with us and we are with Him, and where He meets us to bless us and to show us how much He delights in us, and wants us to meet with Him. There is nothing more needful for any of us, but we need to get to our closets, and get the door shut so that we can be alone with Him.