

Finer Grounds Mini-Series

Matthew 6

Lesson 1: Introduction

Before digging into Matthew 6, we need to keep in mind the expanded context of Jesus' entire sermon. It's important for us to remember that Matthew 5-7 is one sermon which Jesus delivered in a single setting, therefore we should find one unifying theme that Jesus develops throughout the entire sermon. After reading through Jesus' sermon several times, we should ask ourselves, "Does Jesus plainly state His main point which flows throughout chapters 5-7?" The answer is yes! "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven," (Matthew 5:20). Jesus' clear theme throughout His entire sermon is that our righteousness must surpass the kind of righteousness practiced by the scribes and Pharisees. Between Jesus' introduction and conclusion to His sermon we see three contrasts:

- The scribes and Pharisees tried to twist God's law to serve their own purposes, but God wants us to have a righteousness where we want to do what's right from the heart (5:21-48)
- The scribes and Pharisees' righteousness was focused on gratifying themselves, but God wants our righteousness to be centered on Him (6:1-33)
- The scribes and Pharisees had an arrogant righteousness where they thought they were perfect and knew everything, but God wants us to have a righteousness that humbly seeks the truth (7:1-12).

In order to outline the sermon like we have just done, it takes many readings and time studying the sermon as a whole. The purpose of this mini-series is not to outline that process. What I want us to do is to

see how much we can learn from Matthew 6 if we approach it in light of Jesus' entire context. We can learn many great truths by just studying Matthew 6 on its own. However, when we see it in light of Jesus' entire sermon we can really walk away with the truth Jesus intended His original audience to understand. Now that we have Jesus' main theme in our minds, let's dig into Matthew 6...

As we begin our study of this chapter, it's helpful to read the entire chapter first. As you do this, keep an eye out for any natural divisions in this chapter. Since Jesus is contrasting the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees with the kind of righteousness God really wants, do you see any contrasts in this chapter?

Read Matthew 6:1-33 in one sitting.

What areas of righteousness does Jesus contrast in chapter 6? (I see four)

Did you notice a difference in Jesus' style in the second half of this chapter? What difference?

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Read Matthew 6:1

You probably noticed that verses 1-18 go together, because Jesus gives 3 areas of righteousness that we need to “beware” of practicing in front of others in order to be noticed by them. Verse 1 acts as a heading for how we should give, how we should pray, and how we should fast.

Do you think Jesus is saying we’re sinning every time someone else sees us doing a righteous deed? Read Matthew 5:16. Compare this verse to Matthew 6:1; is there a contradiction here, or is Jesus talking about two different types of scenarios? Do you see anything specific in Matthew 6:1 that tells us Jesus is addressing a different subject than in Matthew 5:16?

In Matthew 5:16 Jesus is saying that when people see our good works we need to direct their attention to God so HE gets all the glory, but in Matthew 6:1 He’s talking about us doing a righteous deed in such a way that we’re trying to be noticed by others so that WE receive glory from them.

Jesus says if we practice our righteousness in such a way that we draw attention to ourselves, we have no reward from our Father who is in heaven. What do you think He’s referring to when he talks about a “reward”? Perhaps this just a general reference to heaven, but perhaps Jesus has something more specific in mind. Pay careful attention as you read the following verses, because Jesus will give us the answer to that question.

Read Matthew 6:2

The first area of righteousness Jesus contrasts is how we give to the poor. The phrase “give to the poor” in the original Greek (ΕΛΕΕΜΟΣΥΝΕ) comes from the same root word as “mercy.” It would include things like giving money to the poor, but it’s broader than that. It refers to “an exercise of benevolent goodwill”

(Arndt 315), and would include any kind of charitable deed done to any person in need (the NKJV translates this word better than the NASB). In addition to giving money to the poor, what other actions would fit into this category of charitable deeds?

You’ll notice Jesus says, “when” we do charitable deeds. Why do you think Jesus chose to say “when” instead of “if you do charitable deeds”?

Jesus talks about how the “hypocrites” do charitable deeds (by sounding trumpets in the synagogues and in the streets). We first need to ask ourselves, “what is a hypocrite?” In the original language (HYPOKRITES) was an acting term that depicted actors who were playing a role that was different than who they were in real life (Arndt 1038). An even more important question is: who is Jesus calling hypocrites, given the main theme of His sermon in Matthew 5:20? Given the position of the scribes and Pharisees in Jewish religion, why is this such a powerful statement for Jesus to make in front of His original audience?

The hypocrites (scribes and Pharisees who acted like they were glorifying God but who had ulterior motives), often sounded a trumpet whenever they did a charitable deed. Do you think Jesus is talking about a literal trumpet, or is He using figurative language? Most likely it’s figurative, because it’s doubtful each Pharisee carried a trumpet everywhere he went. Today we might say, “They like to toot their own horn.” Yet why does Jesus use the image of a trumpet, what purpose do trumpets serve?

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What are some ways you've seen people blow a figurative trumpet when they do a charitable deed? Is there any difference between how people of the world do charity versus how God's people should do charity?

He lists the "synagogue" and the "streets" as two places the hypocrites love to do their charitable deeds. These are some of the most public places a Jew would have because they are high traffic areas. If they do something charitable here, everybody will see it and give them credit for being such a righteous person.

First, list some places today that function as high-traffic areas where we will draw lots of attention to ourselves when doing charity.

Secondly, do you think Matthew 6:2 has any influence on the way we use our Facebook accounts? If so, how so?

Jesus says when the hypocrites do charity in this manner, they already have their "reward in full."

What reward do they "already have" when they engage in this kind of giving? Where does this reward come from?

If that's what Jesus means when He refers to a "reward," how does this help us understand the kind of reward from God we should be seeking from verse 1?

Although heaven is of course our ultimate reward, Jesus seems to be contrasting the recognition and praise we could receive from God for our righteous deeds versus the recognition and praise we could receive from men.

Why is God's praise and recognition of us such a greater reward than all the praise or recognition we could ever receive from other people?

Read Matthew 6:3-4

Jesus begins verse 3 with "but when you..." Keep in mind Jesus' main point of His entire sermon. Verse 2 represents the kind of righteousness the scribes and Pharisees practice, a kind of righteousness that will not allow them entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Now, in verses 3-4, Jesus is discussing the kind of

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righteousness we need to practice that surpasses theirs in the area of charitable deeds.

Jesus says whenever we do charity “do not let your left hand know you’re your right hand is doing.” First we need to figure out, is Jesus really talking about hands here? Do our hands actually have eyes they can see with? Does Jesus have some prejudice against left hands? No, Jesus isn’t really talking about hands at all. Again, He’s using figurative language to illustrate a point. But why does He use this imagery, and what is He helping us see? I want you to look at your hands... actually hold them out in front of you right now. How is it possible to do something with your right hand, where your left hand would be totally unaware of it? The only way you can do this is if you put your right hand behind your back.

What’s Jesus’ point? How does God want us to practice our charitable deeds toward others?

Instead of purposely trying to draw attention to what we’re doing, God wants us to try to go about our charitable deeds in ways that do not draw attention to ourselves. If we do charity properly, nobody else will probably even know about it.

Jesus explains His illustration by saying our charity must be done “in secret.” He assures us that our Heavenly Father sees everything done in secret and He will reward us.

Why is it so important for us to remember that our Father sees our secret charities?

How will that reminder help us have a righteousness that’s focused on pleasing God rather than gratifying ourselves?

List some creative ways we can do charitable deeds for others “in secret”?

We might see this verse and think: “Well, if I have to do all my charity in secret then how will people see my good works and glorify God in heaven like Matthew 5:16 says?” If we gave money to a poor person, or a coat to someone in need, who would see our righteous deed? The person we’re trying to help in the first place would see it, and we could point them to God. However, even if we did something charitable for them anonymously, who can they possibly thank? God!

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Can you think of any times in your life when someone did something for you anonymously, and you gave thanks to God?

Jesus helps us see in this passage the right way to engage in charitable deeds versus the hypocritical way of the scribes and Pharisees. Our goal should be to do charity in such a way that we are seeking a reward (praise/recognition) from our heavenly Father instead of a reward (praise/recognition) from other people. In our next lesson we will move on to a second area of righteousness Jesus wants us to practice in our lives.

Works Cited

Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature 2000 : n. pag. Print.

Note: The author uses the New American Standard Update for all quotations and references.