**Matthew 6A**

* + Let’s start by remembering how chapters 5 and 6 of Jesus’ sermon connect
    - In Chapter 5, Jesus exposed the Pharisee’s wrong teaching about the Kingdom
    - He explained how they taught wrongly about who would enter the Kingdom and what God’s standard for righteousness was
  + Jesus said the Pharisees were not the standard for righteousness as they claimed
    - Instead, Jesus said God is our standard for righteousness
    - We are to be as perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect
    - That’s the standard for entering the Kingdom, which we meet only through faith in Jesus Christ
    - But that’s also the standard for our conduct while we await the Kingdom
* That last point leads us into to Jesus’ topic for Chapter 6, which is the proper understanding of righteous conduct
  + Just as the Pharisees taught a false notion of the Kingdom, they also modeled a false way of living righteously
    - Jesus warns His followers not to follow the Pharisees’ example in practicing righteousness

**Matthew 6:1**

*“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

* Jesus says to be careful how you practice your before others
  + We are always “practicing” our righteousness before both God and others
    - Jesus says there is a right way and a wrong way to practice righteousness before men
    - And the wrong way to live out our Christian witness is to do so in order to be by others
  + Put simply, it’s wrong to pursue the approval of people, rather than to pursue the approval of God
    - We play to an audience of one
    - Pharisees sought the approval of men, not God
    - Therefore, the reward they received was an earthly, manmade reward…
    - In the way they practiced their righteousness, the Pharisees received things like political power, earthly wealth, worldly praise, *etc*.
    - In chapter 6, Jesus begins by warning us not to follow their example. Instead, we need to live with eyes for
    - We are to seek to please God rather than seeking to please ourselves or others
    - And we do this, knowing God is a rewarder of those who seek Him
    - When we live seeking to please God, we have opportunity to receive eternal rewards from the God
    - Things like Heavenly authority, Heavenly wealth, Heavenly praise – things that will come to us in the Kingdom

* Back in Chapter 5, Jesus gave us six examples of how the Pharisees taught wrongly about righteousness from their oral law, the Mishnah
  + In each example, Jesus first quoted the Pharisees’ wrong teaching and then proceeded to give the proper view of each issue
    - Again, in this chapter, Jesus will follow the same pattern
    - He cites four examples where the Pharisees commonly sought the approval of men instead of God
  + These four issues hit upon the worst practices of the Pharisees
    - Specifically, they deal with giving to the poor, praying, fasting and wealth
    - In each of these areas, the Pharisees had made a mockery of serving God
    - In each case, they had created their practices to maximize public exposure for the purpose of receiving the praises of men
  + As He did in Chapter 5, Jesus follows His critique by explaining the correct perspective on giving, praying, fasting and wealth
    - In chapter 6, we learn more about the problems in Israel in Jesus’ day
    - But more importantly, we’ll understand how not to make the same mistakes
    - We’ll gain a better appreciation for God’s standard of service-for living out our righteousness
    - Just as God’s standard for obtaining righteousness was much higher than the Pharisees’, so is God’s standard for living it out
  + Finally, in each example, Jesus’ chief concern is ensuring that we safeguard our opportunity for eternal reward
    - We looked at the concept of reward last week
    - Tonight we’ll develop the concept more deeply as we move through these examples
    - The main point is easy to grasp…we can either seek our reward here on earth or in Heaven

**Matthew 6:2-4**

**2***“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.*

**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. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

* Jesus’ first example is on the topic of giving to the
  + As will be the case for each of the four examples, Jesus begins by denying the Pharisaic way of giving
    - Pharisees had arranged a completely self-serving method of giving and encouraging others to give
    - To understand their method, we need to first understand the Jewish practice of giving in general
  + The Law of Moses stipulated that the Jews should give tithes for a variety of reasons
    - Jews were called to tithe for the care of the priests and the upkeep of the temple and to fund the annual feasts
    - And they were also told to take care of the poor
    - In general, they were to maintain a charitable attitude toward anyone in need

**Deuteronomy 15:7-8**

**7***“But if there are any poor Israelites in your towns when you arrive in the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tightfisted toward them.*

**8***Instead, be generous and lend them whatever they need.*

* The Lord also commanded Israel to tithe into a general fund for the needs of the most vulnerable in Jewish society

**Deuteronomy 26:12**

*“Every third year you must offer a special tithe of your crops. In this year of the special tithe you must give your tithes to the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows, so that they will have enough to eat in your towns.*

* Prior to entering the Babylonian captivity, around 600 BC, the Jewish people didn’t have synagogues or local places of worship
  + All tithing was directed toward the tabernacle/temple
  + Nothing precluded an individual Jew from providing charity to a neighbor, and the Law demanded as much
* But all institutional giving went to the temple
  + The Jews physically brought their tithes to the temple and deposited them there
  + Ancient writers report there were 13 large chests in the temple compound to gather the money as it was collected
  + Near the end of Jesus’ ministry, while He’s in the temple with His disciples, Jesus makes the following observation

**Luke 21:1-4**

**1***While Jesus was in the Temple, he watched the rich people dropping their gifts in the collection box.*

**2***Then a poor widow came by and dropped in two small coins.*

**3***“I tell you the truth,” Jesus said, “this poor widow has given more than all the rest of them.*

**4***For they have given a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has.”*

* The treasury Jesus mentions in that passage are the 13 chests in the temple compound
* During Israel’s captivity outside the land and away from the temple, the nation began the practice of meeting in local synagogues
  + Naturally, they began to bring their tithes to the synagogue too
    - Seventy years later, when they returned to the land under Zerubbabel, the Jewish people rebuilt the temple
    - And they returned to bringing tithes to the temple, as the Law required
  + The Jews also continued to establish local synagogues, in addition to the temple
    - And as they did, they continued directing some of their giving to the synagogue, instead of directly to the temple
    - So, each synagogue became a small, local treasury of its own, with local rabbis competing against the temple for donations
    - Naturally, competition breeds innovation
  + What happened was the local rabbis began looking for ways to encourage giving to the local treasury
    - At some point, the Pharisees came upon the idea of announcing large donations at the synagogues with trumpets in the streets
    - The trumpeting would begin in the streets to draw a crowd
    - The Pharisees escorted the giver with his gifts in a procession to the synagogue where the donation was made
  + This scheme was mutually beneficial for both the Pharisees and the giver
    - For the giver, the trumpets garnered the attention of the community, stroking their egos and puffing up their pride
    - Someone once wrote that these donors weren’t giving their money to the poor; they were buying attention for themselves
  + But the scheme also benefitted the synagogue’s rabbi
    - By lavishing public praise on givers, the Pharisees created a powerful incentive for others to give, as well
    - And their goal went beyond merely improving the balance sheet of the synagogue
    - Pharisees were corrupt, they were lovers of money Jesus said, who had their hands in the cookie jar
    - Anything that brought more money into the treasury, also benefitted them personally
* In v.2, Jesus tells us what God thinks of people who give to the poor in this way
  + He calls them
    - The Greek word for “hypocrite” comes from a root word, meaning to act on a stage
    - That’s a good way to understand hypocrisy…it’s pretending to be something you’re not
  + The giver’s hypocrisy was in pretending to be a humble benefactor, seeking to improve the plight of the poor
    - In reality, the giver had only selfish interests
    - First, he sought to improve his standing within the community by receiving maximum attention and for his donation
    - Secondly, he courted the approval of powerful rabbis, knowing it would pay dividends in the future when they needed a
  + The Pharisees’ hypocrisy was in pretending to encourage everyone to obey God’s commandment to give to the
    - In reality, they were manipulating people for their own enrichment
    - The trumpets didn’t increase public concern for the poor
    - It just pressured everyone else to give more money, or else be shamed by the absence of trumpets
    - It was
* Because of their hypocrisy, Jesus says each group had already received their

in full

* + The reward Jesus was speaking about were the earthly gains each group obtained through their unholy alliance
    - The Pharisees received the money they so dearly desired
    - The giver received the public attention they bought with their donation
    - Jesus says both groups should consider themselves fully rewarded for their behavior
    - Because there will be no additional reward in Heaven
  + If we wanted to play devil’s advocate for a moment, we might point out that a donation was made and the poor did benefit
    - So then, what’s the big deal? Who cares about the method?
    - Let’s think back to Chapter 5 for a moment
    - We learned that we don’t have to commit murder in order to violate the sixth commandment
    - And we don’t have to cheat on our spouse to violate the seventh commandment
    - If we so much as hate or lust in our hearts, then when we face the Lord on judgment day, we will be found equally guilty
  + In other words, God cares about how we obey both the of His Law and the of His Law
    - As the Pharisees proved, it’s possible to keep the *letter* of the Law, yet still violate the *spirit* of the Law
* We’re learning that the same principle applies to how we will be rewarded for our service to God
  + Even if we do the “right” thing, if we do it for the wrong reasons, we get no credit with God
    - God cares as much, or more, about our motives as He does about our actions
    - In the case of givers, who made large donations to the poor to receive public praise, Jesus says they gained nothing with God
    - Why not?
    - Because in their hearts, they were motivated by

, rather than by a sincere desire to obey God’s commands or to help the poor

* The reward Jesus is talking about here is the reward believers receive in the Kingdom
  + Jesus is going to talk a lot about reward in this chapter
    - He mentions the word seven times
    - More importantly, Jesus explores the principle of reward in-depth as He moves through each of His examples
    - Beginning with what we’ve learned in this first example
  + Point 1: Reward in the Kingdom is based on more than our actions alone
    - Our reward is conditional on maintaining the proper spirit or motive behind everything we do in service to God
    - The Lord is ready and willing to reward a servant seeking to please Him, to obey with sincere intent
    - We put our reward at risk if we neglect to obey His commands
    - But we also put that reward at risk if we pursue our obedience hypocritically, as man-pleasers rather than God-pleasers
  + Knowing this, we must guard our hearts against the temptation to receive our reward early – that is, on earth
    - As we go about serving Christ, we must continually inspect our motives
    - We have to be honest with ourselves about what we’re doing and we’re doing it
    - So that when we recognize we’re doing the right things for the wrong reasons, we can address it
  + Obviously, we don’t have people offering to blow trumpets when we make large donations to the Church
    - We still have temptations to turn service to God into a “win-win” for God and for us
    - God gets what He wants and we get what we want
    - But Jesus says when we fall for that trap, we’re actually getting less in the long run because we’re trading imperishable, eternal rewards for temporary, earthly rewards
* In the case of giving to the poor, Jesus says the proper heart attitude is to give in such a way that our right hand doesn’t know what our left hand is doing
  + - What Jesus means is that our heart’s desire should be to keep our giving completely concealed from public view
    - In fact, our giving should be so secretive that even our left hand is unaware of what our right hand is doing
  + Practically speaking, that means we should not seek public for our giving in any way
    - We shouldn’t talk about what we give, don’t ask for recognition, and don’t even expect someone to notice
    - And just because we don’t have trumpets by the offering box, that doesn’t mean we don’t have our own ways to accomplish the same effect
    - The modern Church has found its own ways to repeat the Pharisees’ hypocrisy
  + Some examples,
    - Plaques hanging inside a church listing donors for a previous fund drive?
    - Brochures for the church-building campaign thanking “partners” for their contributions
    - A name on a small plaque on the back of a pew
    - Someone’s name on the side of the building
  + More commonly, we risk spoiling our eternal reward with an idle brag in everyday conversation
    - Someone coined a modern term for the person who works a bragging comment into normal conversation
      * We call that person a “humblebrag”
      * For example, a humblebrag says things like:
        + “I need a vacation…I’m exhausted from my 2 weeks in Hawaii”
        + “Have you ever noticed how much longer it takes for large checks to clear your bank account? I’m still waiting for last month’s tithe check to clear my account”
    - One prominent Christian pastor once tweeted to his followers:
      * “I’m truly humbled you follow my tweets…God bless all 200,000 of you!”
    - We must be mindful of our pride and ego
  + But don’t compete for their attention…be content with God’s
    - The key to pleasing God is to maintain pure motives
      * And Jesus says the best way to keep your motives pure is to give anonymously
      * The moment your check hits the bottom of the offering box, or your mouse clicks the donate button, forget it ever happened
      * Say nothing more about it, expect nothing in return
    - Because if you give in that way, then your flesh won’t have interest in the transaction because there’s no reward to be found
      * When you give secretly, the only reason for giving will be a sincere interest in blessing others from a heart desiring to please God
      * And Jesus says the Father sees both our giving and motives, and when we give expecting nothing here, He delights to reward us later
      * On the other hand, when we give in ways that bring attention to our gift, we forfeit eternal reward because we claimed our reward early
    - Notice the contrast between the end of v.2 and Jesus’ statement in v.4
      * To give in such a way that you receive honor from others means taking your reward instead of receiving it in Heaven
      * The point isn’t whether you actually receive what you want…the point is whether you such things
      * If you give expecting an earthly return, Jesus says you have forfeited heavenly return regardless of whether you get what you wanted
      * On the other hand, giving in secret, understanding you are forgoing any recognition now, leaves opportunity for the Lord to reward you later
* Finally, within church leadership,
  + - We must police our own motives too, or else we may follow in the footsteps of the Pharisees blowing trumpets, so to speak
      * Leadership responsibilities will require that some elders or other church members are privy to the giving of other church members
      * Nevertheless, everyone must conduct himself or herself appropriately, despite having this information
      * Specifically, we can never share that information with others, for doing so is gossip and indiscretion
    - Equally important, we must guard our own conduct so that we never treat someone differently based on their giving
      * For example, church leaders can never show special attention to those in the body who they know give at higher levels
      * That means no offers to join the elder board, no reserved seats or parking places, no special invitations to dinner or the ballgame
      * No insider information on major church decisions
      * And certainly no plaques and no names on the side of buildings
    - If we do those things, we make it harder for those under our care to maintain a proper perspective on giving
      * We encourage the kind of hypocrisy Jesus taught against here
      * And we foster a culture of favoritism in the Church, which James specifically condemns in his letter
    - Our goal as leaders in this church must be to maximize your potential eternal reward
      * Specifically, to ensure that everyone under our care enters the Kingdom by faith in Jesus Christ
      * That as the writer of Hebrews says,

**Hebrews 4:1**

*Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.*

* We don’t want anyone to fall short of receiving God’s grace
* Equally important, we care about maximizing the believer’s reward
  + We don’t want anyone under our care to arrive in the Kingdom on that future day having forfeited their eternal reward because we didn’t prepare them for that moment
    - And preparing you means helping you gain eyes for eternity
    - First, teaching you Christ’s commands in His Word, so you will understand His expectations, so you don’t fall from ignorance
    - And secondly, encouraging you to obey all that He commanded so that you won’t fall from disobedience
  + As the writer of Hebrews put it

**Hebrews 12:12-14**

**12***Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.*

**13***“Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.*