

Right Motivation in the Kingdom

Kingdom Living #8 - Pastor Gary Combs - May 18, 2025 - Matthew 6:1-6; 16-18

INTRO: Good morning church! We're continuing our sermon series today entitled, KINGDOM LIVING. It's an expositional study of Christ's Sermon On the Mount found in Matthew 5-7. Many have described it as the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher who ever lived. It describes what life looks like in His kingdom—a kingdom that is radically different from the culture of this world.

Today, we'll be focusing on Matthew 6:1-6; 16-18 We've titled this sermon: RIGHT MOTIVATION IN THE KINGDOM because it addresses King Jesus' call to practice our acts of righteousness, our spiritual disciplines, with the right motive of pleasing God, not people.

Need: In today's world, appearance often trumps authenticity. Social media thrives on applause. Our culture encourages us to project a curated image—whether through photos, achievements, or even spiritual acts, like saying we'll pray for someone or give to some cause we say we care about. But what if the pursuit of human recognition corrupts our faith? What if God isn't impressed by our outward acts at all, but is instead watching our hearts? Watching our motives?

Trans: That's really been the theme of the Sermon on the Mount—Jesus shifting the focus from outward behavior to inward transformation. He's moved the emphasis of the Law from external compliance to internal motives. And now, in Matthew 6, He turns to our spiritual practices, not to say we shouldn't do them, but to teach us how and why we should. He challenges us to examine not just what we do, but why we do it. For in the Kingdom of God, the heart and its motives and attitudes matter most.

BODY: In Matthew 6:1-6; 16-18, Jesus warned His disciples against practicing acts of righteousness with the motive of human recognition rather than God's. We can practice our righteousness with the right motive of pleasing God. How can we practice our righteousness with the right motive of pleasing God? Jesus identifies three spiritual practices that reveal how we are to practice righteousness with the right motive of pleasing God.

Read text: Matthew 6:1-6; 16-18 (ESV) ¹ "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. ² "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 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. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ⁵ "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ... ¹⁶ "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

CHRIST CALLS US TO RIGHT MOTIVATION...

1. When we give, desiring God's reward, not man's recognition.

EXP: (1-4) Jesus begins with a warning: "Beware..." (1) The 1st verse announces His warning about our motives, then in the following verses He identifies three spiritual practices, the 1st being "when you give" (2-4).

"Beware" (1) (προσέχω, *prosechō*) (PAM Present, Active, Imperative) - to give attention to, take heed; beware

"Practicing" (1) (ποιεῖν, *poiein*) - to do; to act rightly, do well; to carry out, to execute; perform

"Righteousness" (1) (δικαιοσύνην, *dikaioṣynēn*) - righteousness, right acts. Here, spiritual disciplines

"Before other people" (1) (ἐμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, *emprosthen tōn anthrōpōn*) - before men.

"In order to be seen" (1) (θεάομαι, *theaomai*) - to look upon, (often used of public shows); to view. "At first sight these words appear to contradict his earlier command to 'let your light shine before others, that they may see...' (Matt.5:16). In both verses he speaks of doing good deeds 'before others' ...But in the earlier case he commands it, while in the later one he prohibits it. How can this discrepancy be resolved? The clue lies in the fact that Jesus is speaking against different sins. It is our human cowardice which made him say 'let your light shine before others', and our human vanity which made him tell us to beware of practising our righteousness in front of others." (Stott, *Sermon*, 138). The glory belongs to God, not you in both cases.

"Show when tempted to hide and hide when tempted to show" — A. B. Bruce

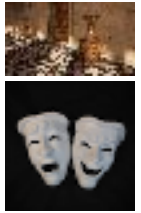
"Reward" (1; 7x) (μισθός, *misthos*) - dues paid for work, wages, hire; reward: fruit resulting from toils.

"Give to the needy" (2) (ἐλεημοσύνη, *eleēmosynē*) - mercy, charity, lit., to do "alms."

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"Sound no trumpet" (2) (σαλπίζω, *salpizō*) - to sound a trumpet. Possibly metaphorical, or the sound the trumpet like offering boxes made when coins were thrown in. These boxes were located in the Court of the Women for offerings to support the Temple.



"Hypocrites" (2; 3x) (ὑποκριτής, *hupokritēs*) - hypocrite, pretender. Origin in the Greek Theater to describe the stage actors who wore masks to portray different characters.

"Praised" (2) (δοξάζω, *doxazō*) - to praise, magnify, celebrate; to honor, to make glorious

"Truly, I say to you" (2) (ἀμὲν λέγω, *amēn legō*) - verily, amen I say. Jesus' formula continues, now moving from addressing the law to addressing religious practices.

"Left hand know ... right hand" (3) (γινώσκω, *ginōskō*) - to come to know. A proverbial phrase to encourage secrecy in giving.

"In secret" (4; 6x) (κρυπτός, *kryptos*) - hidden, concealed, secret; encrypted

"Father who sees in secret" (4; 3x) (βλέπω, *blepō*) - to see. There are no secrets hidden from God's sight.

ARG: Being generous to the poor is like lending to the Lord:

Proverbs 19:17 (ESV) Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.

God cares more about the attitude of your heart than the amount of your gift. Give cheerfully.

2 Corinthians 9:7 (ESV) Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

ILL: Tell the story of the Widow's Mite: (Jesus is watching how and why we give)

Mark 12:41-44 (ESV) ⁴¹ And he [Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. ⁴³ And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. ⁴⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

APP: Evaluate your heart when you give: Are you desiring God's reward or man's recognition? Do you give to be seen by others or under the pressure of others? Or out of cheerful obedience to God? Notice He says: "When you give." Jesus expects us to be givers. Are you a giver? We have several opportunities for giving today: 1) tithes and offerings, 2) baby bottles for Choices Women's Center, 3) Compassion sponsorship.

2. When we pray, seeking God's attention, not man's applause.

EXP: (5-6) Look at v.5 "When you pray." Jesus criticizes those who pray publicly to be seen and admired. Instead, He commands private, sincere prayer—"go into your room and shut the door" (6).

"Pray" (5) (προσεύχομαι, *proseuchomai*) - to offer prayers, to pray; supplicate

"They love to stand and pray" (5) (φιλέω, *phileō*) - to love. It's not the standing to pray or the where they prayed but the love they had for other's approval. Jews prayed the Shema and the Amidah while standing three times a day. Jesus is not rebuking this practice but rather their improper motives.

"Go into your room" (6) (ταμεῖον, *tameion*) - a storeroom; an inner chamber; a secret room, a closet.

"Shut the door" (6) (θύρα, *thura*) - door or gate. Shut the door, so that you will be alone with God.

ARG: Jesus modeled private prayer:

Mark 1:35 (ESV) And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

Luke 5:16 (NIV) But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

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ILL: Tell the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector:

Luke 18:9-13 (ESV) ⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’

Luke 18:14 (ESV) I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

APP: Have you cultivated a habit of private, consistent prayer that seeks intimacy with God? Avoid using prayer to impress others—in public, in small groups, or online. Neither abstain from public prayer because of this concern, nor because you don’t know how to pray. Prayer is not performance; it’s communion with God.

3. When we fast, pursuing God’s reply, not man’s response.

EXP: (16-18) In verses 7-15, Jesus teaches how to pray (we’ll cover that next time), but then He continues His instruction concerning right motives with: “And when you fast” (16). When you fast, Jesus says, don’t look miserable like the hypocrites. Instead, “anoint your head and wash your face” (17). Fast for God, not man.

“**Fast**” (16) (νηστεύω, *nēsteuō*) - to abstain as a religious exercise from food and/or drink.

“**Do not look gloomy**” (16) (σκυθρωπός, *skuthrōpos*) - angry-visaged, gloomy or a sad countenance.

“**Disfigure their faces**” (16) (ἀφανίζω, *aphanizō*) - to render unsightly; to disfigure

“**Anoint your head**” (17) (ἀλείφω, *aleiphō*) - to oil (with perfume), anoint. Continue daily hygiene.

“**Wash your face**” (17) (νίπτω, *nīptō*) - to cleanse, to wash one’s self.

ARG: Right motivation of fasting is to “rend” or humble the heart, not your outward appearance.

Joel 2:12-13 (ESV) “Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.”

Fasting is a way of humbling yourself before the Lord. His reward? He will “lift you up.”

James 4:10 (NIV) Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

ILL: **Jesus was not prohibiting public fasting.** There are many examples of this: Church at Antioch fasted before sending Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:1-3), Esther asked Mordecai and the Jews to fast for 3 days before she met with Xerxes (Esther 4:16). Yet **His 40-day fast is an example of private fasting** (Matt. 4). As Moses fasted 40 days on Mt. Sinai, so Jesus did before delivering His Sermon on the Mount.

APP: Consider practicing fasting privately this week—not to appear spiritual or to lose weight, but to draw near to God. Know why you are fasting. We fast from physical food in order to feast on spiritual food. Is it to express humility and repentance? Is it in pursuit of an answer from God about a decision or to meet a need? The Father sees in secret and honors sincere devotion.

CONCLUSION: Jesus isn’t condemning giving, praying, or fasting. He’s confronting why we do them. In the Kingdom, motivation matters! God rewards those who practice righteousness with sincere motives rather than seeking human recognition.

Examine your motives this week. Ask God to purify your heart. Practice your spiritual disciplines for the audience of One, not for the crowd. Give, pray, and fast for God’s glory, not your own!

Let’s pray.