

Matthew 6:1–18

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[0 : 00] But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. 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. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 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. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, good morning.

It is great to be in your presence. And I am praying that my words will help us worship well.

I don't know if there are many or any under the hearing of my voice this morning who wouldn't like in your daily affairs to know that you could get a little help from God.

[1 : 11] Whether you're a Christian or not, my guess is that if you think God might exist, it would be nice to know that that God would hear you when you pray.

Or through the difficulties of life and those strenuous moments of standing on a precipice of despair, how good it would be to know that you will be able to hear from God.

God helping us. God hearing us. Us being able to hear from God.

And if you're in that world of hopefulness, it's good to come to a text like this where we hear from Jesus in ways that will secure for us that very knowledge.

If you're new to Christ Church, we're in the midst of a fall series which is simply called a vision for Christ Church Chicago. In one sense, we're trying to see beyond the emerging quarantine in ways that will prepare us to emerge together in the light of day and know what it is we're after as a congregation.

[2 : 45] This is the fourth week. We're trying to peer into our own future through the words of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. We've seen who we are.

We've seen the work we are to do. We've noticed the word we are to follow. And today, the worship that we are to bring.

The surprise of the text is right there in the opening verse. Evidently, not all of our worship will be rewarded by God.

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.

In other words, not every ritual we perform here on earth will be rewarded with God's help. Not every righteous action we undertake here will deliver the tangible approval of him even hearing from us.

[4 : 02] The things that we do may not get God's ear and his well done. The argument of the text that was read for us this morning by Pastor Nee is simply this.

Take care lest our worship of God fail to be rewarded by God. The way he makes his argument is he just kind of walks into a third grade class and piles up three examples that are all identically meant to prove the same thing in the same way.

He wants you to take care lest your worship not be rewarded and the examples he provides are the giving to the needy verse 2, prayer by verse 5, and then the third example of fasting which lands like a third pile driver at verse 16.

Notice these things are your personal worship, not our public act and gathering.

there is a corporate gathering of worship and really I'm allowing those of you who are in the room, the hundred or so who are here, I'm allowing your faces to almost be emblazoned upon my mind given the emerging season that will restrict this ability for long.

[5 : 57] There is a corporate worship but the text here is all referencing examples that deal with your private or personal worship of God.

It's not what we do on the first day of the week, it's what you do all week long. What kind of worship will you bring all week long?

that will secure God's daily health or knowledge that He hears or in your dire situation the hope that you would hear from Him.

Well evidently it's not a kind of worship that's done before other people in order to be seen by them. Let me put it to you as simply as I can, this might be the one benefit of an emerging COVID context as we can practice our worship without the added dilemma of doing so to be seen by others.

The first one there's the righteous act of almsgiving verse 2 thus when you give to the needy. There were two perceived benefits benefits of giving to the needy that actually would come to the giver.

[7 : 27] I mean outside of their demonstration and their love of God and their love of neighbor and even outside of the benefit that that gift would give to their neighbor there were two additional benefits that would be received by the one who was giving.

In giving to the poor people believed that God would be approving of them and help them in their daily hour of provision and need. And in giving to the poor at minimum it would be keeping God from appeasing the poor who would otherwise cry out against you before him.

I mean this emerges it might be worth just kind of scurrying back in the scriptures and taking look at Deuteronomy chapter 15 where God's law is speaking about the practice of the private members who are giving to the poor.

This is not April 15th giving that is your civic responsibility where portions are rightly redistributed to the poor. This is not your first day of the week giving where elements are actually given and distributed to those in need.

This is just what you do along the way every day giving. And in chapter 9 I'm sorry in chapter 15 of Deuteronomy and beginning in verse 9 or so you begin to see that they are talking about giving to the poor in your towns and within your lands and that you're not to harden your heart but you're to open your hand to them verse 8 and to bring what is sufficient for their need.

[9 : 18] In verse 9 we hear that you need to do this lest he cry to the Lord against you. In other words it was a benefit to giving. It would keep God from appeasing the poor when they would cry out against you rightfully as they would.

But it says verse 10 you shall give to him freely and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.

You see that was the side benefit of giving. God would help you and God would not be appeasing the poor who would be crying out against you.

And so it was. but then that giving in a sense turned ugly. According to Jesus back in our own text in Matthew 6 that there was a problem emerging by those who were giving to the needy.

Look he says 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.

[10 : 41] But when you give to the needy do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your giving may be in secret. The problem was is that they were parading their giving before the public to receive their praise for having done so.

I'll never forget attending a meeting in Chicago in a church building as a young individual when we were all asked to rise to our feet and to bring our gifts for a particular project.

And they opened by parading the people before us first who were giving the largest gifts even with large checks in their hand it was prearranged.

and they walked on the stage with great strength and vigor and to the applause of all of us who were out there languishing.

And then they began to lower the gift count and you could then come forward and give that amount at any time so that people you would know. Finally I just was about the only one one other individual who left standing not bringing anything and feeling repulsed and guilty all at the same time.

[12 : 00] when you and I give to the poor in a way where our giving becomes self congratulatory our love is really something that's rather crude before the eyes of God.

And if that's what we're doing in our worship in these coming months as we walk out of our condos and our apartments and behind our door and we find tangible meaningful ways where no one else sees and our right hand doesn't really even isn't really aware of what our left hand is doing and we don't we don't tweet about it and we don't talk about it and we don't actually raise a stink about it and we don't blow a trumpet on it.

When we do all that stuff quietly individually we are learning to worship God with the right motivation aren't you tired of seeing the next thing in the Tribune or the Sun-Times that will congratulate somebody for some check they wrote notice and your father who sees in secret will reward you what's the reward what are you going to get from God when you give to the poor with the motivation that is right it seems to me that you get the expectation that God will help you he'll help you he may not give you all you want but he'll give you what you need and he may not even give you what you think you need but he'll give you what he knows is necessary there's a God in the heavens who owns the cattle on a thousand hills and it is nothing for him to kill one and let it roll down a hill right in front of you when you need it it's also nothing for him to let you keep on walking and waiting for his daily provision but this I know that the righteous man who gives to the poor does not go hungry and Job found out even that when he seemed to find his own flesh failing in all of that God nevertheless was trustworthy you'll get God who is your life and your sustenance and more than bread oh may our worship in the coming months be kind of privatized in ways where in our own homes we are learning what it is to be alone with ourself and yet be healthy alone with ourself and yet holy alone with ourself and yet be receiving help from God because we are worshiping well by giving to the poor in absolute silence he he gives another example other than just giving to the needy he goes to prayer prayer is also an act of worship it is one of these verse one a righteous act a righteousness that is performed so what is prayer prayer quite simply is talking to

God prayer are your words spoken to your creator and we pray for the purpose of God hearing us now we read the Bible so that we will hear from God but when we pray we want God to hear us and evidently not all praying actually will gain his ear for it too can be perverted when prayer becomes self-serving the way giving becomes self-congratulatory you've got whatever it is you were really after and what you lose is the sound of your voice received by his own ear he says verse five 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

[17 : 23] I say you they got the reward in other way you you get what you want if what you want is those individuals on the street to think you're a pious person but when you pray look at this I mean you ready for COVID when you pray go into your room shut the door and pray to your father who is in secret get off the street corner and into the prayer closet so that you can learn how to speak words that are rightly motivated I heard one pastor speak on this text and actually wonder aloud how many public prayers were actually heard by God because they're so often delivered by our frail and feeble attempts at a spoken corporate word that we're worried about how it all sounds and what the people out there think about my use of language and when we pray we're not talking to one another we're talking to

God and you can learn that on your own at least you won't have over the next few months the mitigating temptation to be trying to do it to be seen by others when the motivation is wrong our reward is forfeited and even the manner can also get messed up like how many words you bring you're not supposed to you know this is the one of if there is a problem with the all night prayer meeting it's thinking that the longer we go eventually he's going to have to hear us when actually we're supposed to pray unceasingly I get that and at all times in other words do you ever pray for a long time the answer should be no but I'm offering ceaseless prayers but they're all short but you don't work your way up to God with many words he's not like that and sometimes we think that if I can just

I gotta learn how to do that prayer thing if I could just do the hour thing if I could do the three hour thing if I could do the many word thing he's like no that that's a pagan thing God is as close to you through his spirit and his ability to hear as your hand is from your face so when you say dear God creator of the heavens and the earth he hears you can lay on the floor in your apartment with your nose to the carpet and offer in the quietness of a whisper something that your father will hear but it's it's when the motivation is right it's when you really you want to talk to him rather than perform for people

God will hear you it's interesting that the motivation can be wrong and the manner can be wrong and then he offers a method did you notice that the Lord's prayer is tucked right in there he almost offers you a method that will help you over the next few months I don't have time to expound the Lord's prayer today I did at one point in my past write a song a children's song called the Lord's prayer prayer is talking to God the Lord's prayer teaches us how the first thing to do no matter what happens to you is pray father in heaven you know okay it goes like that in fact if you're at home on zoom I'll have them throw that throw that little children's song I wrote into the chat box because maybe it's something you can print out and use with your own children over the coming months there's a method to prayer that is helpful in learning and notice it's all the things first of all that you speak to

God as a father he's that intimate with you and then you speak to him about the things that concern him before you just roll out to him all the things that concern yourself so there's a method that'll be there but the key thing today is take care lest your worship of God not be rewarded by God take care lest in your private prayers you don't even get his ear what a waste that would be maybe there's so much for us to learn in these coming months about the worship we are to bring the third argument with almost the exact same language picks up in verse 16 and when you fast I mean if giving for self-congratulation is wrong and praying in ways that are self-serving is wrong you can be assured that the self-discipline of fasting if done as a way to feed the ego of self is likewise wrong when you go without eating to gorge your own ego you have created something distasteful in the mouth of

[23 : 17] God well why do we fast or why do people fast if we pray so that God will hear us when you start to explore the scriptures or more even generally common practice people fast at really dire times as they are seeking to hear from God on a particular situation or they're asking God to act in ways that will alleviate something or answer his will on something so so we we find people fasting as an effort to help them hear from God I was thinking of the first time this really appears in the scriptures which when Moses was on the mountain the second time in Exodus 34 27 to 28 it says that he was on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights and he wasn't taking food or water so he was fasting and the result of the fasting is that God gives him the tent the words that are to be lived by the people in other words he hears from

God in the in the context of going without food indicating to God that he needs God's voice on a particular thing and this is reaffirmed in Deuteronomy 9 9 and 10 when he says this I was fasting and in the midst of the fasting God spoke to us and our people there are many situations over the coming months probably innumerable as or at least as many as there are people under the sound of my voice where you will need to hear something from God and if you should so choose to fast in order to make yourself open to him it says do not look gloomy like the hypocrites for they disfigure their faces that their fasting might be seen by others truly I say to you they receive the reward but when you fast anoint your head wash your face that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your father who is in secret you know I know two men dear friends pastors both who regularly fast one of them was Arthur

Jackson the other Ed Copeland and they do it regularly and while I've known them for decades never did I know they were doing it other than when I was ordering my meal they said I'm not going to order anything today they never paraded it they didn't keep from food to feed their own ego they knew that would have been distasteful this is the kind of worship that God would have us learn when giving may it not be self congratulatory when praying may it not be self serving when fasting may it not be self seeking lest all of our worship be self defeating

I lament that we're preparing to go back into the quietness and isolation of our individual homes I hate what COVID does to the community I'm exhausted from the havoc it wreaks on the local church but perhaps even this divinely providentially given evil will do some personal private good as we all learn how to worship well through stated commitments to give to the poor through learning what it is to even personally or privately pray through what it might entail to go without until he should speak our heavenly father help us to worship well and to receive the reward of your presence in ways that might be an astonishingly grand and invigorating gift for any here today who know they need your help may you provide for any who need you to hear may you listen to any who are languishing and awaiting the sound of your own voice may you be there in their hour of need in Christ's name we pray amen to amen to amen to amen