

Generosity for the Audience of One

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[0:00] Good morning. My name is Billy Nye. I have the privilege to be on staff here at Christ the King Church, and it's my joy to open the word with you this morning.

Well, if you didn't know already, let me tell you now, human beings are odd. We're an odd bunch. There are lots of things that make us odd.

I think the very fact that SpongeBob SquarePants is not only a product of human creativity but also a popular TV show, that says something about how odd we are.

I'm sorry if you're a fan. I never was. But here's another reason we're an odd group. We do all sorts of good things, which on the outside appear to be virtuous and right and even God-pleasing, but we do them for the wrong reasons.

And we start young, too. I'm glad my daughter just left because I'm about to talk about her. One of my children, I will not name names, is prone to doing this.

[1:09] This is how she does it. She will often sweetly, with a very sweet tone, share a toy with her brother. Here, Zaya, you want this toy, don't you?

Would you like to have this toy? And on the surface, it looks like she is doing the right thing. But that sweet gesture is totally ruined when it becomes very apparent that she's sharing that toy in order for him to drop the toy that she really wants so that she can get what she was after all along.

Right thing, right deed, wrong reason. So today, brothers and sisters, Jesus has some strong words of warning for us. Our master Jesus knows what is best for us.

He also knows us really well. And he knows that a heart that has mixed motives is not what is best for us. He is after something else, something far better for us.

So would you turn with me to Matthew 6? We're going to read the first four verses of Matthew 6. We actually will start up in the last verse of chapter 5. As you turn there, let me just give you the context.

[2:23] If you haven't been here recently, you may not know, but we're in the middle of a series on the Sermon on the Mount. Pastor Mike has been leading us through several parts of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is bringing a hammer down again and again and again and again, clarifying for us the heart behind God's holy law.

That it was revealed in the Old Testament. And he shows us again and again and again that he is after our full, wholehearted obedience to God's perfect holiness, not just our obedience to the surface.

So now, let's hear in Matthew 6 how Jesus is going to continue to call us into our Father's holy perfection, but he's going to do it in a slightly different area of our lives.

So let's read. I'll start in verse 48 of chapter 5. Let's read from God's holy word. Verse 49.

As we saw last week and for the past month or two, Jesus has been calling us to a full-on imitation of his Father's infinite holiness.

[4:20] Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. But now Jesus is turning a corner. He's going to call us to that same imitation of God's perfect holiness, but in another area of our lives that might surprise us.

In our acts of devotion and service to God. That's right. Our spiritual disciplines, our godly habits, our good deeds of righteous living, these are all the right things that Christians are called to do.

But even these things, and perhaps especially these things, are in danger. They are in danger of being done for the wrong reason.

Because of the deceptiveness of our sinful hearts. So in this passage, Jesus is telling his kingdom citizens to perform their acts of devotion with only one holy aim, to please their heavenly Father. That's it. No mixed motives. So we are to do all of our acts of godliness, whether giving, prayer, fasting, Bible reading, singing, songs of worship, all of them with one holy aim, and that is to please our heavenly Father, nothing else.

[5:41] This is the principle that we see in verse 1. I'll expound it in just a second. We're also going to see that there's a practice of this principle that's being spelled out, particularly with regard to our acts of generosity.

So we've got a principle laid out. We see the practice of it with generosity. But then we're going to step back, and we're going to see that there's a problem. And then lastly, we're going to see a promise that God is making to us as we step into obedience to this principle.

So four Ps, principle, practice, problem, promise. First, let's unpack the principle. Look with me at verse 1 again.

Prepositions, they're important. Look with me at verse 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.

Let's get one thing straight from the get-go. Jesus is not saying, don't do acts of righteousness in front of other people. This would be impossible because we pray at the dinner table in front of our family.

[6:52] We read our Bible in the school cafeteria. We raise our hands in public worship. We place a check in the offering plate as it goes by. We read scripture out loud for a small group.

We serve at the Sunday morning breakfast. We paint the 1962 edition on your day off. Thank you all for all of you who are painting. Our works of righteousness are inevitably public.

That's just life. But it's not just life. It's also God's design. Look back with me to chapter 5, verse 16. Jesus telling his disciples, you're the light of the world.

You're the salt of the earth. So because you're the light of the world, in the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works. They're supposed to be public.

But here's the reason. So they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. So our righteousness is to be on public display in such a way that those who see our works of righteousness, our works of devotion to the Father, would be able to turn their eyes from us and give glory to our Father because it's reflecting His infinite holiness.

[8:08] So yes, our right actions, our good deeds are to be done in front of others. That's inevitable. And it's God's design. But Jesus is not talking about just the surface level here.

He is going beneath. And He is getting to the heart level. The key of this principle is in the phrase, in order to be seen by them.

Man, Jesus knows us, doesn't He? He knows that in and of ourselves, as soon as our desperately sick hearts sense that we're doing something good, we will start looking for an audience.

And then we will be doing the right things for the wrong reason. Have you ever sensed this in yourself? Ever catch yourself thinking this when you're praying out loud at a small group thinking, boy, that sounded pretty spiritual.

I hope they take notice of that. We laugh because we know it's true, right? Or have you ever had this wonder through your mind when you're lifting your hands in praise and you're like, I must look pretty devoted to God right now.

[9:16] Or have you ever let drop a hint of your godliness in a conversation? Maybe you're really sincerely trying to help a brother or sister by telling them something to encourage you from God's Word that week, but you're really kind of hoping at the same time that they notice that you were reading God's Word that week.

That's why Jesus tells us to watch out. In the words of one commentator, as soon as Jesus gives the command, be perfect, he turns right around and tells us, be careful.

He knows that as soon as we begin pursuing the perfection of our Father's holiness, we will be tempted to hijack that pursuit of holiness and put it to use in the service of self, not in the service of God.

Jesus is not naive. He knows how easily we can deceive ourselves. He knows that we can deceive ourselves into thinking we're doing the right thing out of devotion for God when we're really doing it at the same time to build our own ego and serve our reputation.

He knows how we like to hijack the right things of the kingdom of God and use them to build the kingdom of self. Jesus knows how easily we do this and he knows how bad it is for us.

[10:35] Look at the last part of verse 1. For then, you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. And it is our Father's reward that is to be our only motivation as we practice our righteousness.

More on that reward a little bit later when we get to the promise. So, what's the principle? All of our acts of devotion to God. Giving generously, praying faithfully, reading scripture deeply, singing with joy on a Sunday morning, serving others with your gifts, all of it is to be done for one reason and one reason only, to please your Heavenly Father.

That's the principle. Now, let's look at the practice of that principle as it's applied to our acts of generosity. Let's look at verses 2 through 4.

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.

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, and so that your giving may be in secret and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

[11:54] So, here's the practice of that principle in a nutshell. It is important to Jesus that we give generously to the needy and it is equally important how and why we give generously to the needy.

Back in Jesus' day, as well as in our day, generosity is a pillar of a godly life. The Bible has a lot to say about our money and our resources.

I recently read 2 Corinthians 8 in my devotions where Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to consider the way that Christ has acted generously toward them as a motivation to give generously. There was a collection going up for the needy brothers and sisters in Jerusalem and he was appealing to the Corinthians' experience of God's grace on their behalf, God dealing generously with them.

So, he says, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sake, he became poor so that by his poverty you might become rich.

[13:00] That's the foundation of Christian generosity. Christ has been so generous to us. And so, it's natural that we give generously and cheerfully to others who are in need because our Father has acted so generously toward us.

But Jesus knows that as soon as he calls us to imitate his generosity, the deception of our hearts will pervert that right act of generosity to give for the wrong reason.

So, in verse 2, he's saying, don't call attention to yourselves. Don't try to get glory for yourselves.

He tells his disciples not to sound a trumpet before them when they're being generous.

That's what the hypocrites do. There's no historical evidence that any Jews actually blew trumpets as they sought to give to the needy. Jesus is using extreme language to paint a picture of how absurd it is to call attention to our good deeds.

It's like you're blowing a trumpet in the streets, blowing a trumpet in the synagogue, saying, look at me, tooting your horn. And what's the reason these hypocrites are tooting their horn?

[14:07] That they may be praised by others. The original language is even more damning. That they may be glorified by others. Yikes.

I thought Jesus made it pretty clear in verse 16 of chapter 5, let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to you. Give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

That glory belongs to God. But in seeking to call attention to their generosity, they're seeking to get glory for themselves. They're becoming glory stealers. Because deep in their sinful hearts, these hypocrites desperately desire the exaltation of self above the exaltation of God.

It's like the moon refusing to acknowledge that its light is only a reflected glory from the sun. The moon was made to reflect the sun's glory, not steal it for itself.

We were made to reflect God's glory to others, not steal it for ourselves. And so Jesus at the end of verse 2 tells the glory stealers that they will get what they want.

[15:17] That's all they'll get. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. They are paid in full. They want a few heads to turn. They'll probably get it.

If you want to subtly establish a reputation as a godly person by stealing God's glory through your public acts of generosity, then you might get that. That's all you'll get.

That word hypocrites comes from the Greek literature for an actor on a stage. As one commentator puts it, all that actors get is the applause of a fickle crowd.

Nothing more. So, what do we do now? How do we not be like that? Well, Jesus turns and gives his disciples some advice about how to be generous in a way that is pleasing to their Heavenly Father. In verses 3 and 4, he commands us to give secretly and sincerely to please our Heavenly Father only. So, instead of tooting your horn to call attention to your generosity, Jesus says, don't even let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

[16:33] In other words, our King, this is pretty crazy, our King is telling us to be so discreet in our generosity toward others that we barely take notice of it ourselves.

Let alone try to make others notice. He's saying, don't just not announce it to others, don't even announce it to yourself. Take enough notice to do the deed and then put it out of your mind so that spiritual pride doesn't take root.

In the words of John Stott, Christian giving is to be marked by self-sacrifice and self-forgetfulness, not self-congratulation.

Congratulation. Jesus follows us up with a purpose so that your giving may be in secret. And oh, by the way, the Father who sees in secret, He will reward you.

So, are Christians to give generously of the resources? Absolutely. It's part of the way we respond to God's generous grace toward us. But Jesus calls it to do it in such a way that we only desire the secret audience of our Heavenly Father, the only one who sees in secret.

[17:51] Jesus' followers are commanded to live their entire lives in the presence of their Father who is in Heaven. He sees us, He knows us, even down to the thoughts and intentions of our hearts.

That is generosity for the audience of one. Now, I wish I could say Amen, let's go home. I wish I could say that.

Maybe you're wishing that too. I wish I could send everybody off with a healthy reminder to give generously for the audience of one and we're out of here. But that would be cruel because if you're anything like me, then you probably just had Jesus unearth a really big problem because He's just given you a clear command to do the right thing for the right reason.

So here's that third P, problem. What's the problem? The problem is that this is really hard to do. In fact, if we're honest, none of us ever really do this consistently.

Our motives are seemingly always mixed. And that makes us wonder, can we do this? Is this kind of holiness possible?

[19:10] Is this a bar that I can reach? Our hearts are so deceptive, aren't they? We can convince others that we're doing the right thing because we love God and we desire good for others and yet all the while we're secretly hoping something, that someone will notice how much we love God and how much we love others.

maybe we even try to give secretly. Maybe we even give an anonymous gift to someone. Maybe we make sure to fold our checks so they're not seen and we put them in the offering plate so it's not seen how much we give.

Maybe we give generously with our time and our energy and an act of service or ministry and we don't do it in a way that calls attention to ourselves and we really try hard not to do that but then what are we tempted to do?

We hope that someone traces that anonymous gift back to us so that we can be thought of as someone who's really godly, who gives in secret.

We hope that someone saw us fold that check in half and noticed our modesty. We hope that someone sees our humble act of service in the way we didn't call attention to ourselves and considers us a truly generous and humble person.

[20:26] Or maybe it's even worse maybe we simply just boast about it to ourselves. Maybe we simply congratulate ourselves rewarding ourselves with what people would reward us with if they knew how generous and humble we were.

Ah! Are we that messed up? Or is that just me? Maybe it's just me. I don't know. That's a problem. That's a very big problem.

Maybe we do the right thing but it's almost always with some mixed motive, with some divided heart. And there's this cocktail of wrong reasons that just comes out of the depths of our hearts that love to steal glory from our creator.

We take the simplest command of Jesus to give generously and we hijack it to serve our reputation. Is perfection without pretense possible?

Is holiness without hypocrisy possible? Is it possible to glorify God without glorifying self?

[21:31] Who can do that? Who is sufficient for these things? Because we know ourselves. Well in a word, in a beautiful and wonderful word, Jesus is.

Jesus is sufficient for these things. Look back with me to Matthew 5, 17. Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets.

I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. Jesus gives us a really high standard. He hasn't come to abolish the law and bring it down. In fact, He raised the bar because He pointed to the level of our hearts.

But notice what He says. I came to fulfill it. Jesus came to fulfill God's holy law. He came not only to tell us that God's law must be obeyed fully at the heart level, He came to live it.

In all of Jesus' acts of righteousness, He always sought the glory of His heavenly Father. In all of His generosity, He did it completely for the glory of His Father and for the good of the person He was helping.

[22:38] His heart was not divided. His motives were not mixed between a desire to please God and a desire to please self. He always did the right things for the right reasons.

His heart was fully intact, pleasing His Father perfectly at all times, even when He was tired, when He was stressed out, or unpopular, or hungry, or lonely.

And then He obeyed the Father to the very end, fulfilling all righteousness by going under the flood of God's wrath for sinners. the perfect one died for the pretentious.

The holy one died for the hypocrites. The one who always lived for the audience of one was now put to death by those who craved the glory of self.

And it's through this, Jesus, that you and I receive a righteousness we could never get on our own by faith. It's through our trust in Him that we can die to self and we can live to please our Heavenly Father.

[23:46] He's the one who solves this problem. If you're like me, this particular sin of loving the praise of others is a problem. If you've ever paid attention to the motives of your heart, you know that that's probably there in some way.

But Paul gives us a little hint in Philippians 3 that through Jesus we can aim at the perfect holiness of our Heavenly Father and strive on even when we fail.

This is what Paul says in Philippians 3. I am not already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me His own. Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Yes, this is a problem. But as we set our sight on Jesus and press on, we can repent when we fail and we can trust and pray for the grace we need to grow in our sincere devotion to our Heavenly Father.

Principle, practice, problem. Now let's finish up with a promise. There's a promise that God gives us as we strive to give generously for the audience of one.

[25:04] Did you catch all those references that Jesus made to rewards in these verses? The hypocrites, they only get the reward that they're after. That's because the approval of others and your own reputation, it's temporary.

It's unsatisfying. We weren't made to be satisfied with the applause of a fickle crowd. We were made to be satisfied in deep, satisfying relationship with the God who made us.

The God who sees us. The God before whom we live our entire lives. And He's also the God who knows how to reward those who diligently seek His approval for His glory.

That's the promise. The promise is that God is the one that keeps the books. We don't have to be. We don't have to try to keep track of how we're doing.

We don't have to either before God or others. As we seek to please our Heavenly Father, He's the one that we can trust. He's going to take care of the final outcome.

[26:11] Now certainly, the New Testament does talk about some heavenly eternal rewards. Paul talks about the crown of righteousness that awaits those who love His appearing.

Jesus talks about recompense for His disciples who have given up the things of this world to follow Him. How Jesus is going to supply everything they need both in this life and the life to come.

There's reward for those who follow Christ. But I want to concentrate just on the big obvious reward that's here in this chapter. The reward of living for the audience of one is our renewed joy-producing relationship with our Father who sees us in secret.

When my kids do the right thing and I can tell it's for the right reason, the right reason of wanting to please me and do what's right because it's right, oh man, that just makes my day.

And I love it when they do this because it doesn't just make me happy, it makes them happy.

Whenever Isaiah or Karis, Micah's too young, but whenever they do this, do something that they know is right and they know they're doing it for the right reason and they see me, see them do it and they're like, they're just going to get giddy and they kind of come up next to me and they want to be with me.

[27:34] Why? It's because our relationship is okay, there's nothing between us and that's a source of joy for both of us and that's God's promise to us when we give generously of ourselves for his pleasure only.

At the very least, discounting any further heavenly reward, at the very least, he promises us, he promises us a deeper awareness of his presence, a greater desire to please him and the satisfying joy of knowing that we are his people and he is our God and there's nothing between us.

It's what we were made for and as our relationship with God grows, it displaces the joy-deadening appetites of seeking the glory of self.

If you notice when you're seeking after your own reputation how unhappy you are, I know I know that. As Martin Lloyd-Jones wrote, we must have such a love for God, listen to this, imagine you having this, we must have such a love for God that we have no time to think about ourselves.

What a reward would that be? No anxious looking around to see if my generosity was noticed. No concern about my reputation as a godly person or how people see me.

[28:59] To be free from the enslavement of self-awareness and self-promotion and to be free to know and enjoy God's love for me as his child seeking only his glory in my acts of righteousness.

What could be better than that kind of reward? So brothers and sisters, let's be generous with our time, our resources, our money because our God is generous.

Let's look for opportunities to cheerfully give out of a genuine concern for others and to please our Heavenly Father. Let's also be careful. Let's ask the Lord to examine our hearts.

Let's be careful of the deception that can come out of our glory stealing hearts to seek to rob God's glory from Him and totally dissatisfy us.

May the promise of a joyful and unbroken and undivided relationship with our Father beckon us to a life of integrity and pure motives. and when we fail, brothers and sisters, let's quickly repent.

[30:10] Let's not dwell there. Let's repent of our absurd pride of tooting our own horn. Let's repent of our hypocrisy. Our God knows our frame.

He knows we're dust. He forgives generously. And finally, let's set our eyes on Jesus. He's the one through whom we please our Father with undivided hearts.

It's by the power of His Spirit dwelling within us that we are enabled to do the right thing for the right reason as we live lives that are generous to His glory.

Amen. Let's pray. Amen. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Father, we're aware of Your eyes. We know that in Christ we don't have to be afraid. We know that in Christ we have only to repent of our stupid pride, to put it off, to abandon the mixed motive of stealing glory from You, and to seek to be in a living, satisfying, day by day, moment by moment, satisfying relationship with You, seeking to please You all day long.

[31:39] I pray for my brothers and sisters that You would enable them to walk in this, cause us to lift our eyes to You now, to see Your sparkling righteousness, Lord Jesus.

and may that take our eyes off of ourselves and get us on You. Lead us in this by the power of Your Spirit, we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.