

Giving to the Needy

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[0 : 00] Good morning, Church. Good morning. The scripture reading for today is taken from Deuteronomy chapter 24, verses 19 through 22,¹ and also Matthew chapter 6, verses 1 through 4.

When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward.

It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt. Therefore, I command you to do this.

Matthew chapter 6, verses 1 through 4.

[1 : 41] Let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your father, who sees in secret, will reward you.

Thank you very much, Joan. For this morning, we are resuming our Sermon on the Mount sermon series. We have come to a new section in the Sermon on the Mount.

In this new section, Jesus addresses how those who belong to him are to practice acts of righteousness. And Jesus introduces this section with a warning.

He says, He doesn't give warnings in vain.

He doesn't give us empty warnings. And so we need to pay close attention to what he says. We need to be careful how we practice acts of righteousness.

[3 : 09] But what is clear from this section that we have come to this morning? Though it's new, it's not isolated. It is connected to what Jesus started to address back in chapter 5, in verse 20.

When he said, For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

This word righteousness is used throughout Scripture. It means different things at different times. It takes on different meanings depending on the context. And here, Jesus is using it to refer to good deeds that are done towards God.

They're done mindful of God. They're done in God's name. That's what he's referring to, these acts of righteousness, these acts that express some kind of conviction, relationship, desire to serve the Lord.

Now, we're going to do three separate sermons on these acts of righteousness that Jesus talks about.

[4 : 23] There are three of them that he addresses. The first is giving to the needy. The second is praying to God. And the third is fasting from food. And so we're going to give attention to each one of these in a separate sermon.

Now, I think we all know that there are more acts of righteousness than just these three. There are more practices of those who belong to God that they engage in.

So why does Jesus pick these three? Well, he picks these three because in Jewish religion, and in particular among the Pharisees, they consider these three acts of righteousness to be the chief evidences of piety towards God.

They consider these three acts more than anything to show that a person was truly devoted to God, giving to the needy, praying to God, and fasting from food.

And that is why Jesus singles them out. But what is clear is that the Pharisees really didn't practice these.

[5 : 37] They abused them. And that's what Jesus is addressing, how they abused them. They abused them because Jesus says in verse 1, they performed these acts of righteousness to be seen by men not in service to God.

And Jesus calls them hypocrites. And the word hypocrite is a very interesting word because if we were to refer to a hypocrite today, we would say an actor, somebody who acts in a movie or something like that.

In Jesus' day, the hypocrite was a person who acted in a Greek play. And that person would put on a mask, and they would act out whatever role was given to them.

And so Jesus used that word to talk about people who acted the part of seeking to serve him when they were not serving him. They used their acts of righteousness as a mask to shield who they really were.

They pretended to be worshiping God, pretended to be devoted to God, but behind that was a person who was self-serving and who wanted attention for themselves and not to point to the Lord.

[6 : 54] And so Jesus refers to those who act that way as hypocrites. I think we should see, though, that behind the abuse of the Pharisees, even though Jesus addressed it and corrected it, Jesus assumed that his disciples would practice these acts of righteousness.

He assumed they would do it as evidence that they belonged to him. And notice what he says. He says, when you give to the needy, not if you give to the needy, when you give to the needy, says that in verse 2.

And later, when you pray, in verse 5, not if you pray. And then in verse 16, when you fast, not if you fast. And so, brothers and sisters, we who belong to Christ are to live lives that are marked by acts of righteousness.

Not to be seen by people, but because we belong to God. And in doing so, we give evidence that we belong to him.

And since we're dedicating three separate sermons to these three acts of righteousness, I think it's important to see how they are connected and how Jesus is actually doing one teaching on all of them.

[8 : 20] Notice that when Jesus talks about giving to the needy in secret, praying to God in secret, fasting from food in secret, he gives the same promise at the end of each one of them.

He says, and your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you. We see that promise in verse 4, in verse 6, and in verse 18.

So let's hear these three sermons in a connected way as we hear them over the next three Sundays. But this morning, we will direct our attention to the first act of righteousness, giving to the needy.

This act of righteousness was abused in Jesus' day. And I think you'd agree with me, it is abused in our day as well. And so let's hear these words as Jesus warns us about not abusing this act of righteousness.

Let's pray. Father, we bow our hearts this morning. We thank you for the privilege of being able to gather as your people with brothers and sisters to hear from you through the preaching of your word.

[9 : 39] Lord, would you speak to our hearts? And Lord, would you use your word to transform our lives and conform us more and more into the image of Jesus Christ?

Lord, you know where each one of us is. You know what each one of us needs. And we pray that you would speak. And ultimately, Lord, that you would bring glory to your name.

Lord, would you grant me the help of your spirit, that I would be faithful to your word, and that I would be helpful to all those who hear.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So this morning, I want to consider two aspects of giving to the needy that Jesus addresses in this short passage that we have in Matthew 6.

And the first is how we give to the needy. Excuse me. Notice again what he says in verse 2.

[10 : 53] 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. There were two very public places that the Pharisees chose to give to the needy, the synagogue and in the streets.

And these are two places that people would be. People would be in the synagogues. People would be in the streets. And not only that, they would be in close proximity to one another. And as hard as

it is to believe, the Pharisees, when they would perform this act of giving to the poor, they would have someone who would have a trumpet and would be a trumpeter, and that person would blow a trumpet and call attention to what they were doing.

And of course, if you're out and you hear a trumpet blown, you are drawn towards the sound. You look in that direction. You move in that direction. The Pharisees did that to bring dramatic attention to what they were doing.

And they did it to draw attention to themselves so that they would be seen and they would be praised for their generosity. And Jesus says, don't be like the hypocrites.

[12:23] He says to his disciples, don't be like the hypocrites. And notice, even though people were being helped, and even though the Pharisee may have been generous in giving, Jesus still objects.

And sometimes we can develop the attitude that, well, what matters is that they get help. What matters is that you actually did it. No, Jesus says it is important to do it the right way.

And so he objects to this attention-grabbing approach to giving to the needy. And notice how he does in verses 3 and 4.

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.

And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Notice how Jesus personifies our hands. As if they know. And he says, don't even let your right hand, typically our strongest hand, not giving hand, know what your left hand is doing.

[13:32] And what Jesus is doing is he is exaggerating to make the point. He's exaggerating his speech to make the point. And the point is, when we give to the needy, we have to make every effort to do it privately, to do it secretly, not for the eyes of others.

That's how we are to give to the needy. Now let's think about what Jesus is saying in a practical way. And so, for example, does this mean, is Jesus saying that if a husband gives to someone in need, that he shouldn't tell his wife, or if a wife gives to someone in need, she shouldn't tell her husband.

He's not saying that. As a matter of fact, in most marriages, there's probably a discussion before the giving is actually done. And so, there's some disclosure about this act of righteousness, and it's not just between the person who gives and the person who receives.

And the truth is that sometimes, there is no way to give in a totally secret manner. So, is Jesus saying, if you can give totally secret, don't give at all?

He's not saying that. I mean, for example, if you're in a food store, you're standing in line waiting to check out, and there's someone in front of you who doesn't have enough money to pay for whatever they're buying, and you're able to make up the difference.

[15:08] The cash is there, the person is there, perhaps other people around. Does it mean that you can't help because others will see it and it's in a public way? It doesn't mean that at all. Whether you give it to the person, you give it to the cashier, it's going to be in a public way.

Jesus is not addressing that. He's not calling us to some mechanical approach. He's not giving to the needy. I think the point that Jesus is making is that we are to make every effort, as much as possible, when we give to the needy, to do it in a private manner.

That we don't seek to draw attention to ourselves. We don't seek to draw attention even to the person. Oftentimes, people criticize the church and say, well, churches don't give to the needy. And the truth is, churches are bound by the same practice that Jesus lays out, that we are not to give in a way that is to publicly draw attention to what we actually do.

And yet I'm sure many of you have seen, as I have seen, far too many times than I wish to recount, how churches, when giving to the needy, would invite the press, would take videos and post it on social media and brag and boast about what they do.

[16:44] That's not what the Lord has called us to do. And so if people complain that they don't see our acts of righteousness, that should not tempt us to go and be contrary to what Scripture actually says.

We are called to do this for an audience of one, whether that is you personally or me personally, that is our responsibility collectively as a church to give in a manner that is discreet and mindful that we give to an audience of one.

What Brother Troy shared this morning is our church's burden and our approach to supporting the needy. It's done with discretion. It's done confidentially.

It's not done to broadcast and create fanfare. It's done ultimately in service to the Lord. I remember a number of years ago when I was on the board of Tain Challenge, there was a local bank that wanted to give to Tain Challenge and so they invited us to there.

They invited the board down to their office downtown. And this was before the day of cell phones. And they had us waiting and we couldn't understand why they were making us wait.

[18:09] They gave us a specific time. And the secretary to the president ran out and told us that they had a problem.

They didn't have a camera. And they wanted to take a picture of us receiving the check. And she had to go downtown. She literally went downtown as we waited and she flagged down Franklin Ferguson, this very popular photographer, and had him to come and then they gave us a check after about an hour and a half of waiting.

Now a bank could do that because a bank is into public relations and that's probably a part of their strategy to say we help the community and so forth. But that's not legitimate for the church, brothers and sisters.

It's not legitimate for the church. That's the way of the world. But for the church, it's very different. Now I realize that sometimes in the church you may need to create awareness of a ministry like a soup kitchen, like a clothing ministry or food.

You create awareness of it. But you don't shine cameras on people when they come to get help. And you don't broadcast to the world that you have helped people because that's not the motivation.

[19:30] The motivation is that we do it for an audience of one. Now some of you might be thinking, well, earlier in chapter 5, Jesus said, in verse 16, let your light shine before men so they may see your good works and glorify your Father who's in heaven.

And now he's telling us that we are not to let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. And on the face of it, it may seem like a contradiction, but it's not a contradiction. And we know it's not a contradiction by even knowing how we may reconcile the two because Scripture doesn't contradict itself.

I think John Stott gets it right when he talks about how we are to understand the two things that Jesus is saying.

He says in Matthew 5, 16, what Jesus is concerned about is cowardice and fear, meaning that sometimes we are reluctant to identify with God and his purposes and the things of God and we are tempted to hide and to not let a light be on us or what we might be actually doing.

And then he says here in Matthew 6, 3 to 4, what Jesus is addressing is self-promotion and boasting, meaning that there are times when we desire to be seen and praised by others.

[21:13] So Jesus is addressing two separate things. In the Matthew 5 part of the Sermon on the Mount, he's addressing our tendency sometimes to not want to identify with his purposes.

So we hide our light under a bushel, as it were. But here, he's addressing this tendency where sometimes we want to brag and boast and draw attention to what we may be doing and he says we are to avoid that.

A.B. Bruce, a Scottish minister who's dead now, he put it well when he reconciled these two and he said that we are to show when tempted to hide.

That's the Matthew 5 passage. And we are to hide when tempted to show. That's the Matthew 6 passage. Just being aware of that.

Being aware of what's going on in our hearts when we are reluctant and we are hesitant about the light of Christ in our lives. And then when those times when we may be prideful and wanting to draw attention to ourselves.

[22:28] So, brothers and sisters, Jesus is concerned about the needy and how his disciples give to the needy and so we need to ponder his words.

We need to take them seriously. Again, he expected that his disciples would give to the needy and so the question this morning is do you give to the needy?

Do you have eyes and a heart to help the needy?

Do you have eyes to see the needs? Do you have a heart to help when you see needs and you are able to help? And when you give, how do you give?

Do you give in a manner that is consistent with the words of Jesus or do you give in a manner that is more designed to draw attention to yourself?

[23 : 24] That eyes would be upon you and you would be praised for your act of righteousness. And the truth is that we all have different circumstances and we find ourselves in different seasons and so our ability to respond to needs varies.

It varies from time to time. It varies from season to season. And so what is important is that each of us would try to hear the words of Jesus in the context in which we find ourselves and that we would try to obey the words of Jesus in the context in which we hear, we find ourselves.

Now, sometimes there are people who are thinking, well, give to the needy. I'm needy. And so my circumstances are such that I really can't give to the needy.

But I encourage you to really think about that. If that's your heart this morning, if you're thinking, I'm needy and so I can't give to the needy, I just encourage you to think about that because oftentimes we can find that there are people who are even more needy than we are.

And we're able to give to their needs, but it would require sacrifice. And the truth is that oftentimes being able to give to the needy requires that we sacrifice.

[24 : 50] if we just waited to have excess and abundance to be able to give, things are always coming up.

Demands are always coming at us and it is so easy to find ourselves, well, I don't have enough excess. But many times the ability to give comes from a willingness to sacrifice.

sacrifice. It comes from having a heart for the needy and a willingness to sacrifice. The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 commended the churches of Macedonia because of their sacrificial giving towards the needs of others.

and he held them up not just to the Corinthian church but he held them up to the churches. He holds them up to us as examples of those who would give out of their sacrifice.

Listen to what he says. We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia. For in a severe test of affliction their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

[26 : 15] For they gave according to their means as I can testify and beyond their means of their own free will begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in this relief of the saints.

And so sometimes the only way that we are able to give to the needy is the sacrifice. The sacrifice as the Macedonian churches did. They were so moved by the need that they forgot their neediness, they forgot their poverty, and they gave.

They gave so much, Paul said, they gave not just according to their ability, they gave above their ability to give. Brothers and sisters, that's the heart that we should have as we give.

Let me say two other things before I move on to the second point. I know that sermons like this, especially if you have a tender conscience, it could cause you to get to the place where you just want to give to every single person who you meet who has a need, and then you become needy. And sometimes that's the way we can respond to a sermon like this. Indeed, I believe it's one of the ways the enemy would cause us to miss the point that Jesus is making.

[27 : 41] Jesus is not saying to us that we are to respond to every single need that we come across. How do I know that? I know that because he has not given us the resources to meet every single need that comes our way.

need. Jesus would not call me to meet every single need that I meet and not give me enough resources to meet them.

So the mere fact that you and I have less resources than all the needs should tell us that God doesn't want us to meet all the needs. So it's not as simple as giving to every single need.

What we need to do is we need to be discerning about those needs that the Lord would have us to give to. This requires prayer, requires staying close to the Lord, it requires a dependence on the Lord to help us to discern the needs that we should be meeting.

And the truth is we don't always get it right. The truth is sometimes we miss it either way.

Sometimes we may miss responding to a need that we should.

[28 : 59] And sometimes we miss responding to a need that we shouldn't. But at the end of the day, neither one of those is important. What is important is the parts of our hearts before the Lord.

What is important is how we posture our hearts before the Lord towards the needy, to want to help as best as we're able to help.

The second thing I want to share is that we should remember that Scripture calls us to first meet the needs of those who are the household of faith.

That's the priority. In Galatians 6.10, Scripture says we need to do good to all people as we have opportunity, but especially to those who are the household of faith.

That is the priority that we are given in Scripture. And what we see in Scripture is we see a centralized approach to caring for the needy.

[30 : 05] If you read the book of Acts, the first six chapters of the book of Acts lays out again and again that the early church met the needs of the needy in a centralized way.

There were people who would sell possessions and they would give the proceeds to the apostles and they would have it distributed to those who are in need.

The first deacons in Acts chapter six, they were appointed for the specific task of providing food daily for the widows in their midst.

And this kind of centralized care is wise. This kind of centralized care is better than each one of us, kind of like on an individual level, trying to meet needs that come our way.

This kind of centralized care is more efficient, it brings far more accountability, and then those who are responsible for it, you can expect the God will give them wisdom in that task of caring for those who are needy.

[31 : 14] And this certainly doesn't mean that we never give to an individual who has a need, it doesn't mean that at all, but it means that that's not the pattern, that's not the norm. And if you find that maybe this is, you're giving to someone and it's in an ongoing way, that's a good sign that that's something that needs to be centralized.

Maybe a one-off situation, something not very substantial, but when it is a substantial need, when it is a recurring need, those are needs that are best centralized and consideration given to how best to help them.

And one of the sad realities about helping the needy is sometimes helping can hurt. Sometimes helping can hurt.

Sometimes a person, for example, who needs discipline, a person who needs discretion, ongoing subsidizing of a lack of discipline, ongoing subsidizing of a lack of discretion, that's hurting and not really helping.

And so a centralized approach, household of faith first, is what we see in Scripture. So that's the first aspect of giving to the needy that Jesus addresses, how we give to the needy.

[32 : 48] He says we're to do it secretly, we're to do it privately. The second aspect that he addresses is why we give to the needy.

And this is my second and final point. Why do we give to the needy? Well, behind this question is motivation. What is our motivation for giving to the needy?

What does Jesus say? First, notice how he draws attention to what the Pharisees were doing in verse 1. He says they were giving to be seen by others.

In verse 2, he says they were giving that they might be praised by others. Jesus says don't give for these reasons. Now, while it's very clear from this passage why we should not give, why we shouldn't give to the needy, needy, I think we have to really think about it a bit to see what Jesus is saying about why we should give to the needy.

And I think the two main motives, the two driving motivations that should be behind are giving to the needy. And the first is that we genuinely want to help.

[34 : 10] We genuinely have a heart for the needy, we genuinely want to care for the needy, unlike the hypocrites who genuinely want to be seen and praised.

And this motive of wanting to truly help the needy, it reflects the heart of God. It reflects the heart of God. You cannot read Scripture starting in the Old Testament without coming away with the conviction God has a heart for the needy.

God has a heart for the poor. The three typical groups of people who tended to be needy were the sojourner, someone who didn't live in a country, they were just passing through, so they didn't have the kinds of societal connections and they could be very vulnerable.

Orphans, those who had no parents, and widows, those who didn't have a husband, women who didn't have a husband, to care for them. And we would see repeatedly throughout Scripture, the Lord's care for them.

And we also got to see our natural heart, our natural heart, left to ourselves, brothers and sisters, we're cold-hearted. So much so that in Israel, the Lord had to enshrine in law that they take care of the sojourner, the orphan, and the widow.

[35 : 40] And that's the first passage that was read this morning out of Deuteronomy 24. The Lord said to them, when you go and you work your fields, don't you strip it bare.

Don't you go back and try to make sure you take everything off of it. When you beat the olive tree and olives fall to the ground, don't go and beat it again and beat it again until you take everything off of it.

Leave something for those who are needy. Leave something for the sojourner, for the orphan, for the widows.

Today we don't have a written law to care for the needy. We don't have a written law that we can look at. But we have God's law written on our hearts if we belong to him.

our hearts are to reflect the heart of the God who cares for the needy.

[36 : 41] Listen to what James says in James 1 27. James says, religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the father is this, to visit orphans and riddles in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Brothers and sisters, if our religion, if the religion we practice, is not concerned for the needy, James says it's not pure religion, it's not undefiled religion, it's not true religion.

I say that's the first reason that we give. We give because we're motivated by the heart of God.

He has transformed our hearts and so we have a heart for the needy. The second reason we give, again, we have to think about it, it's not so obvious, notice it three times in this passage, in verse 1 and in verse 2 and verse 4, Jesus uses the word reward.

He says in verses 1 and 2 that the hypocrites did what they did to get a reward from men, and then in verse 4 he says, when his disciples give in secret, their father, who sees in secret, will reward them.

[38 : 18] So as Jesus saying that we are to give for a reward, not at all. He's not saying that we are to give for a reward.

In fact, the reward that Jesus refers to is, it is really the result of our giving, our giving, but it's not the reason for our giving.

The reason that Christ's disciples are to give to the needy and to do so in the manner that he lays down, is that it is an expression of true righteousness.

It is an expression of one who is in right standing with God, one whose life has been transformed by God. That's really why we give.

That's really why we give in the way that the Lord tells us to give, because it is an evidence that we belong to him, we are in right standing with him.

[39 : 32] And isn't it a kindness from the Lord to reward us for our giving? our ability to give is because he has transformed our hearts and he has enabled us to give.

We have nothing except what he has given to us. And so he enables us to have a heart for the poor, he gives us the resources to be able to give, and then he still turns around and he rewards our giving.

How kind is that? It reminds me a number of years ago of a guy whose wife didn't work and he was boasting about the gift that she bought for him.

The Lord gives us all that we have, and yet he rewards our giving.

Brothers and sisters, when we are able to give to the needy, it should humble us. When we are able to give to the needy, we should be humbled to remember that God has blessed us.

[40 : 45] God has enabled us to give. He has given us a heart to give. When we give to the needy, we should be mindful of the grace of God, but for the grace of God, there go you, there go I, that we could be the needy one.

when we give to the needy, we should remember that all that I have comes from the Lord. As I close this morning, I want to encourage us to take very seriously this warning from Jesus, because it is a real and a necessary warning.

Jesus wants his disciples not to be hypocrites in their giving. If this was not a possibility, there is no need to warn us.

Even we who belong to Jesus can possibly find ourselves being the hypocrite, giving to be seen by men, giving to draw attention to ourselves and to be praised by men.

And so we need to take very seriously what the Lord Jesus is saying to us, warning us, don't be like the hypocrites, don't do what they do. Wrongly desiring the praise that belongs to God alone.

[42 : 21] What this helps us to see is the doctrine of sin and the doctrine of depravity. That even after we come to Christ, even after we have been translated our darkness into light, we still battle sin.

And we can battle sin in this very sensitive area of giving to the needy. And it's more than just refraining from broadcasting it and bragging about it publicly.

we're so sinful that we could be gloating in our hearts. We're so sinful that we could be praising ourselves within our hearts and the God who sees all and knows all knows that.

And so he warns us, don't be like the hypocrites. And this reminds us of our need to stay close to the Lord.

This reminds us of our need to cry out to the Lord for mercy, to fight sin. So that when we perform our acts of righteousness, they are done for an audience of one.

[43 : 33] They're not done for the eyes of people. If people happen to see them, well then they happen to see it. But that was not our intention. And so brothers and sisters, I pray that we would see our deep need for the Lord even as we practice these acts of righteousness beginning with this first one, giving to the needy.

If you're here this morning or you're watching online and you don't know the Lord, I trust you see that even since we who belong to Christ can struggle in doing right for the right reasons, even more so those who don't belong to Christ.

But if you don't know Christ, the issue is more than just your motivation for giving to the needy. If you don't know Christ, the issue is you need a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because even if it were possible for you to do these good deeds of giving to the needy, and as far as you're aware, you have no tainted desire in doing it, that cannot save you.

The only thing that can save you is a right relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who invites sinners to come to him, and he makes this promise, whoever comes to me, I will never turn away.

[45 : 14] It doesn't matter who the person is, it doesn't matter what they have done, there's this open promise to them, come to me, I will never turn you away.

And so if you don't know Jesus Christ this morning, whether you're present, whether you're watching online, I say, come to Jesus, and what you will find is an amazing and gracious Savior who is quick to pardon every sin.

We sang about it this morning. We sang his mercy is more. His mercy is far more than our greatest sin. He struggles to forgive no one.

forgiveness. He forgives abundantly and generously. And so I say this morning, if you don't know Jesus, come to Jesus.

Turn from sin and trust in him. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we are grateful that you have transformed our hearts.

[46 : 32] We thank you that you have transformed our lives. You have enabled us to desire to do acts of righteousness in your name.

and for your glory. Lord, would you help us to be aware of indwelling sin.

And help us by the power of the Holy Spirit to mortify every desire to seek to draw attention to our giving. We help the needy.

And may your name be praised and glorified in all of our righteous acts. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.