

# Matthew 6:16-18

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[ 0 : 00 ] One of Shoreline's pastors and I get to open God's word with you today if you'll open up to Matthew chapter 6. We'll begin in verse 16 and I have to agree with Christy.

Carl is easy to love. This morning Jesus is going to talk. We're in the Sermon on the Mount. He's going to be speaking about fasting.

That is making a choice to go without food for a period of time. And I think this is going to be an interesting sermon.

We will see how this goes. If you don't have a Bible, we have them on the back table. They're already bookmarked to today's passage.

And if you don't own a Bible, that's yours now. It's our gift to you. Join me in God's word. Jesus says in Matthew 6, beginning in verse 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.

[ 1 : 08 ] 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. Let's pray. Lord, our God, will you, in these quiet moments, speak and challenge us?

Lord, will you also comfort us? Will you convict us? Will you point us to Jesus Christ? Will you do that here? Will you do that with our children as our children's ministers?

Will you be glorified in your church today and forever?

We pray that in Christ's name. Amen. Now, I bet I know what you're thinking, because I thought it too. Why are we preaching a sermon on fasting?

[ 2 : 14 ] This is a Baptist church. We don't do fasts. We do potlucks. Right? But this isn't actually a passage about fasting.

Not really. And this isn't a sermon about fasting. Not really. See, since Easter, we have been walking through Jesus' most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount.

He began at the beginning of chapter 5 by pronouncing blessings, and we call them beatitudes, on the citizens of his kingdom, in their humility, their love, their hunger for God's righteousness.

And these are all the products of their new life in Christ. And then in the second half of chapter 5, he says to those people, you are the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

How? By living out that heart-deep righteousness better than the religious professionals of their day. Something like, sure, the hypocrites don't murder, but I say to you, that selfish anger, the heart of murder, is just as horrible in God's eyes.

[ 3 : 35 ] And it isn't salt and light for the world because, well, people are smart. They know real humility from its counterfeit, true holiness from false.

And then two weeks ago, as we entered this new section in chapter 6, Jesus tells us that though we are the light of the world, we must be careful how we shine that light.

It's not a spotlight on us. We are not to practice our Christian faith in order to make ourselves look good.

We are only salt and light to the degree that we point to Jesus, not ourselves. And so if we use our faith to serve ourselves, to make ourselves look good, well, who's really being worshipped there?

It's not Christ. And that's Jesus' whole point for this entire section. Beginning chapter 6, verse 1, he says, Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

[ 4 : 47 ] And so if you're an outline kind of person, you might want to write that into your Bible. Verse 1 is the main point, and then there are three examples of it. The main point is in verse 1.

And then example 1 that Matt preached two weeks ago is in verses 2 through 4. And he showed us that when Jesus spoke about giving, our motive matters.

Don't give in order to look good in front of other people. And the second example, we saw last week in verses 5 through 15 where Reese taught us to pray truly Christian prayers, not for an audience of other people, but to our God and King.

When Jesus speaks about prayer, he wants us to actually engage deeply with our Father in heaven, not to impress other people. And here today, in verses 16 through 18, we see the third example of what Jesus wants to say about our hearts.

And so fasting is simply the opportunity for him to expose our hearts. And so he says, don't practice your faith so other people think you're awesome.

[ 6 : 01 ] Practice your faith to connect with, to worship, and enjoy your Father in heaven. So this passage is mostly about your heart and my heart.

Why do we practice our faith? For what audience? And for what purpose? Why do you attend Sunday worship?

Is it to appease someone? Why do you give and attend and participate? Is it to impress someone? Or do you come to practice your faith with your eyes set on your Heavenly Father?

If we exercise our faith to look good in front of others, here's what Jesus says to us. Verse 16.

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. If you practice your faith to look good in front of people, that's all you get.

[ 7 : 26 ] That's it. And it's all on you to make sure you actually get it. Right?

So if you mess it up, if you make sure everyone can see how holy you are, but you don't get all the recognition you want, that you'd like, too bad.

That's on you. If the people that you are practicing your righteousness in front of see through your humble brag, and it turns their stomach and turns them against you, too bad.

That's on you. And even if you do get the recognition you want, but it fades quickly, it's all on you to get more.

Just before we started this series in the Sermon on the Mount, we spent two Sundays asking, what does God think about my work? One thing that we saw is that God cares, I'm sorry, I'm having trouble with this today.

[ 8 : 43 ] God cares that we're not people pleasers. That's true in our work, and I think it's true in the expression of our religious life as well. Here's what we said about the why don't we want to be people pleasers.

If you want other people's approval, you have turned everyone into your judge, and you will never run out of judges, and you will never know peace.

And all the while, as you work endlessly to appease those judges, God is on the sideline because you put him there.

It's true for our work as a student, as a parent, as an employee, and it's true for our religious practices like fasting. In fact, fasting to impress other people shows that we have a broken relationship with God.

It shows unbelief. See, fasting to impress other people expresses unbelief in some way. Either it means that you don't really believe that he exists, and so, well, I better get my reward from people who do exist.

[ 10 : 09 ] If I'm going to put on this whole show, I might as well get something out of it. One pastor said, if God is not real to you, it will be miserable to endure fasting, with God as the only one who knows.

Or, it could be unbelief that he really cares and rewards his people, and so you better settle for whatever kind of reward you can get. Or, it might be unbelief that he and his reward are best. So you better go for the better reward. And we are tempted. I think we really are tempted to think that this world's praise is the better reward.

Dale Carnegie, in his book, How to Win Friends and Influence People, One of his main points is, a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.

The praise of men is a powerful drug. Is it not? And so, if we make a show of our religious life in front of other people, we have missed the point of our religious life.

[ 11 : 35 ] It doesn't matter how holy and humble I can convince you that I am. It's not what it's about. And the great irony is that trying to look humble in front of other people is a prideful performance.

Almsgiving, prayer, and fasting were very common expressions of faith in Christ's day. And I'm going to take a quick detour and talk about one of the things that the contemporary church thinks of very much in terms of the practice of our faith, and that is parenting.

We are going to come back to fasting, but I just feel strongly compelled to go in this direction for a brief moment. In his book, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, Ted Tripp writes, if you teach your child to obey and to perform for approval from you and from others, can you see how that's connected to what we're talking about today?

Fasting for approval. If we teach our children to obey for parental approval or the approval of other people, he says, you present an unbiblical objective.

Parents, that means that you can bring up your children in the discipline of the Lord, that is, do not steal, do not lie, do justice, without the instruction of the Lord, which says, the Lord looks at the heart.

[ 13 : 16 ] Here's a simple and easy test for you. When your kids misbehave at church, and they will, and when you correct them for it, and you will, they are smart.

They can tell the difference between the reasons why you are correcting them. They can see your heart because they know you, and they're intuitive.

they will know whether you want them to behave so that they don't embarrass you in front of nice church people.

Or, they can tell that you care about their heart, and that you care about why sinful desire in them has set them on the path of disobedience.

They can tell. If you want obedience to look good, to be seen by others, or if you want obedience to restore them to Christ, and so can your Father in Heaven.

[ 14 : 31 ] Now, I don't want to just scold you for a wrong attitude in parenting. I want to release you from the burden of feeling like you have to put on a show of perfect kids in front of church.

And if on the other side, you cast disapproving glances and snide comments at parents with misbehaving kids, will you repent? Those things put pressure on parents to discipline for wrong motives.

Instead, will you rather absorb the annoyance of an unruly child and celebrate the parent who corrects them with gospel grace and shepherds their hearts? Back to fasting.

So, we've kind of discussed how not to fast, how not to go into our fasting. How should we fast? If it's not to impress others, is it to impress God?

What is it for? And what kind of God wants us to go without food anyway? Two weeks ago, Matt taught us that the lesson of this whole section, verses 1 through 18, is, your motive matters.

[ 15 : 52 ] The heart behind every action, including our fasting, shows either a right or a wrong relationship with God. But here's the trouble.

it is not enough to simply say, don't fast for the eyes of men, fast for the eyes of God. That's not enough because there are still wrong ways to fast for God.

I think we can fall off course on two sides. And the cross of Christ is the correction each time. The first danger is that if we fast for the eyes of God so that He'll accept us, we have gone wrong.

See, sometimes we feel unworthy of God's love and we want to do something to make sure we don't fall away from His grace. And so we fast to impress Him enough to accept us.

We turn fasting into a sort of penance where we try to keep ourselves worthy of His love. friends, the cross is evidence that we don't need to impress Him.

[ 17 : 14 ] Jesus died in our place to pay for our sins before we were ever born. He loved us while we were still His enemies.

He chose to adopt us as family before we ever wanted Him. The cross of Christ is the evidence that you don't need to earn God's favor so don't fast in front of God's eyes trying to make Him love you. He already does. 1 John 4 19 says we love because He first loved us.

The second way we can fall off the rails fasting towards our God is if we fast for the eyes of God so that He'll do what we want. I'm afraid we sometimes do our religious practice including fasting to impress God enough so He'll give us nice things or give us our way.

now that can look like prideful presumption with a transaction kind of mindset if I make this sacrifice for God He'll owe me and give me what I want or it could come from a timidity well God won't pay attention to me until I give Him a sacrifice big enough to get His attention.

[ 18 : 47 ] Friends the cross of Christ is the evidence that we don't need to earn God's favor it is also the evidence that we cannot impress Him. If you could earn your standing with God Jesus didn't need to go and die on a cross.

Pretending you can get what you want out of God by your little fast is foolish pride. God the God who made the world and everything in it Paul says being Lord of heaven and earth does not live in temples made by man nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

The cross of Christ is the evidence that you don't need to earn God's favor and so let the gospel release you from having to try.

The cross of Christ is the evidence that you can't put him in your debt so repent if you think you can. So how should we fast and why should we fast?

Verses 17 and 18 give us the answers. He tells us the how in verse 17. But when you fast anoint your head and wash your face go through your normal routine we don't anoint our head but put in your hair product not me but you wear your makeup also not me but you get the idea don't draw attention to the fact that you're fasting.

[ 20 : 46 ] It's not for other people it's for you and your God. And while we're talking about the how of fasting let me add a few practical points. There are no commands for new covenant believers on how we are to fast on specific days.

There's no date you must fast. There's one day under the old covenant the day of atonement that the Hebrew people had to fast but you have Christian freedom to choose the rhythms that you do this.

And so let no one put a burden on you that you must that they're better than you that they do it more than we have freedom in Christ. If you don't have a lot of experience in fasting I'd recommend starting with just 24 hours.

Many people choose and I personally found that fasting from dinner to dinner that 24 hours is a very helpful time frame to use. If you're doing a fast from food only you're not fasting from drink as well make sure you're staying hydrated it's really helpful.

Have some scripture on which to meditate throughout the fast is really spiritually fruitful for you. And some people should get guidance from a doctor if you have insulin issues or thyroid issues or other hormonal difficulties.

[ 22 : 10 ] Expectant and nursing mothers should talk to a doctor. Some people have medicines that need to be taken with food. So if you have medical questions about fasting talk to a doctor.

But here's the why of verse 18. It says 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 where we get back to that point that central theme our motive matters. He says our father who sees in secret will reward you.

What is this reward? he wants us to actually be desiring it like he's holding this out in each of the three examples.

He's holding out a reward from the father. What is it? The first thing we must say is that because we've already talked about how the cross of Christ means we can't put him in our debt.

[ 23 : 18 ] We can't do a transaction with him. And so it's not something that is owed to us. This is not a meritorious reward, something we have earned, not something that God owes me for my sacrifice.

This is a reward of grace. Our father delights to give his children good things. And the Bible gives us examples of saints fasting for many reasons.

People fasting when they are seeking God's guidance or asking for his deliverance or his protection. People fasting in order to humble themselves before him or to express their repentance or express their grief.

In fact, we saw earlier in chapter 4 that Jesus fasted leading into a temptation. Many people choose to fast on a semi-regular basis simply to draw near to the Lord.

And I think that that helps us get towards this reward idea. I think that this reward is not primarily something in the future.

[ 24 : 41 ] I think it is primarily something today. And I think that for a couple reasons. First, it's no accident that this follows prayer.

He didn't put this in front of prayer. He put it after. And I asked Jordan last week when he was making the announcements to remind us, hey, pay attention to this sermon on prayer because if prayer is not life-giving to you, you will miss out probably the primary benefit and joy from fasting. fasting. You see, fasting is a tool for fellowship with God because it launches us into prayer. And so it is no accident that it follows right on the heels of his teaching on prayer. Now, like many American Christians, I don't have extensive experience fasting.

And so when we were planning out this series, I was like, oh, I gotta, you know, start doing that again. And so I didn't have recent experience and, you know, I didn't have anything to share.

[ 25 : 47 ] And so for the last several months, I have been fasting fairly regularly. And what I have found personally is that fasting keeps drawing me continually into prayer.

It launches me. it pushes me into prayer. I don't know about you, but my primary barrier to prayer is distraction.

I just get busy. Life is busy. And I just forget to do it. Except at kind of like routine times throughout the day. But like, I don't walk in prayer because I'm distracted.

Fasting interrupts my distraction. prayer. And I say to myself, oh, Christ. And it drives me again and again and again throughout the day into the presence of my Savior.

And I walk with him so much more fully than when I'm not fasting. praying. I go to prayer, sometimes a lengthy prayer, but more often short and simple prayers.

[ 27 : 06 ] And I meet with my God, my Father in heaven, and I delight in him. That's the reward. That's the joy. And my whole day, I find, is consumed in prayer, which means it's full of Christ, which means it's full of joy.

Jesus died on a cross and rose from the grave. Why? Why?

So we could escape judgment? Yes. But even more, so we could be brought near to God as beloved sons and daughters.

Our justification is a means to an end and reconciliation and fellowship with the living God is that end. And fasting drives us moment by moment into that fellowship.

Fasting is not God exacting a toll on us. Fasting is not us making a transaction with him.

[ 28 : 22 ] Fasting is our Father beckoning us to walk with him all the day long. Friends, just my simple experience.

When I fast, my brief hunger is a servant to my joy. And I hope that it will be for you. Christians, fast for joy joy, because it draws us into his presence where there is fullness of joy.

Let's pray. Let's pray. O Christ, our King, thank you that you came to this earth to rescue and to redeem us so that we might be reconciled to you.

Lord, will you help us in our hearts to celebrate that and in our hearts to commune and fellowship with you in prayer?

Lord, will you be glorified in us as we seek to walk with you? Lord, may we not practice our spiritual life for an audience of other people, but to actually meet with you.

[ 30 : 04 ] And Father, I pray that you would help us even in short order. Lord, will you bring new life into the lives of our congregation as people pick up this practice of fasting for their joy, their joy in fellowship with our risen Savior.

We pray that in his name. Amen. Amen.