

The Spiritual Discipline of Giving

by Dick Woodward

The sermon emphasizes the importance of giving as a spiritual discipline and the need to give as unto God, not to be seen by men.

Duration: 22:37

Scripture: Matthew 5:3-12, Matthew 6:1-6, Matthew 6:16-21, Matthew 6:24, Matthew 7:12

Topics: "Giving"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5 and 6, specifically on the importance of having the right values and demonstrating them in our relationships. Jesus emphasizes the need to go beyond the norm and practice grace and love towards others, even those who may not reciprocate. The speaker highlights the spiritual disciplines of giving, praying, and fasting, emphasizing that these should be done with a vertical focus towards God, rather than seeking recognition from others. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the significance of giving as a spiritual discipline that reflects our commitment to God and allows us to measure our level of devotion.

Transcript

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and welcome to the Mini-Bible College. In this portion of our study in the Sermon on the Mount, our teacher will help us better understand the teachings of Jesus Christ about doing things to be rewarded by men, or doing things as unto God, to be rewarded by our Heavenly Father. Listen carefully to today's lesson, because the Lord has much He wants to teach you and me as we strive to be His disciples.

Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them, otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will himself reward you openly. I have read the first four verses of Matthew chapter 6 as we move through this magnificent teaching that we call the Sermon on the Mount. This of course brings us to a new part of the teaching.

In chapter 5 you might say that the teaching of Jesus has caused us to look inward. The Beatitudes tell us to look into our heart of hearts and see if God is really working His miracle in our heart. If the miracle of the new birth is, in fact, taking place within us, we will soon discover these new attitudes, like the attitudes Jesus has profiled for us in the first part of Matthew chapter 5. We will find these attitudes in our heart.

We will find them growing and developing. They won't be there in their totality or else we would be perfect. But there is a sense in which we will find these attitudes there and we will want to see these attitudes grow in us.

So the Beatitudes tell us to look inward. But then the rest of Matthew 5 told us to look around. How do you relate these beautiful attitudes to your brother, your adversary, women, or your wife? How do you relate these beautiful attitudes to the evil person, or to the neighbor, or the enemy? That is the essence of a large part of Matthew chapter 5. Look around and apply.

Having looked inward and having discovered that there is a miracle taking place in your heart of hearts, in your inner man, it makes you want to grow and develop that miracle by cooperating with the one who is making that miracle happen. Once you discover that, by the grace of God, you have the reality of the new birth. Then you'll want to look around and ask yourself how this miracle relates to the people in your life.

How does it relate to the world in which you find yourself? By the time Jesus gets through telling us what our relationships ought to be, if by the grace of God we have the reality we are supposed to have when we look inward, then how does that reality work out in relationships? By the time he gets through telling you how your relationships should be, as these beautiful attitudes are related to the people in your life, you are ready for chapter 6 because what he's going to say is this, now look upward. Jesus asks the question at the end of Matthew 5, what are you doing more than others? Are you different? Are you special? Are there things in your life and in your relationships that require grace? What grace do you practice if all you do is love those who love you? Or only greet those who greet you? Do you have a cultivation list like everybody else, a list of people you want to cultivate because of what they are going to do for you? If you are only playing games like that, like those games the people of this world play, there's nothing different about you. There's nothing special about you.

In other words, if you only greet your friends, what grace do you practice? You see, it takes grace to turn the left cheek when someone strikes you on the right cheek. It takes grace to respond to evil persons or enemies the way Jesus taught us to respond at the end of chapter 5. As you think about working out the reality of the miracle within and through all your relationships of life, it would not take you very long to realize that you need supernatural grace to do something like that. Where does that grace come from? Having looked inward and having looked around, now you are really ready for this.

Chapter 6 says, now look upward and receive from God the grace to have the miracle within and to relate in these miraculous ways as you look around. In chapter 6, we have the up look. The first part of chapter 6 has to do with the spiritual disciplines that must be developed in our upward look.

Jesus tells us about the spiritual discipline of giving in the first four verses. And then Jesus says, when you pray, let me tell you how you should pray. If you are going to have this miracle when you look inward and this miracle when you look around, you need the grace that comes from praying.

And then he talks about fasting. In the first 18 verses of chapter 6, you have these three spiritual disciplines, giving, praying and fasting. They all have to do with the upward look and we will look at them

one at a time.

Then beginning at verse 19 through the end of the chapter, you have what we might call the spiritual values. It takes these spiritual disciplines to be an answer, to be a solution for Jesus. If we are going to be part of the solution and part of the answer rather than part of the problem, then we need spiritual disciplines in our lives.

We have to maintain these spiritual disciplines all the time. It's not enough simply to have spiritual disciplines. One of the most important things about the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is found in the second half of Matthew 6, where we are going to find the teaching of Jesus about values.

Have you ever discovered the values of Jesus? Jesus Christ has a value system. He has a set of values. We all have a set of values.

The great challenge as we come through this teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is this. Do we have the values of Christ? Do we value what God values? Did you know the scripture tells us to confess Jesus Christ? What does it mean to confess Jesus Christ? We are told to confess our sins and we are told to confess Jesus Christ. Well the word confess is a compound word in the Greek language.

It's made of two words, sameness and saying. It really means to say the same thing or to speak sameness or to agree. When you confess your sins, you're not only saying that you are sorry or that you are sorry you got caught.

What you are doing is looking at your sin and then agreeing with God. You are saying the same thing God says about your sin. That is our part.

When we do that, then we have this promise that God will be faithful to his word. And when we confess our sins and confess God, he will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from any and all unrighteousness. But what does it mean to confess Jesus Christ? This is how we know the word confess cannot mean to say that you are sorry.

You cannot be sorry about Jesus Christ. Confess means speaking sameness. With Jesus, by following Jesus through the scripture, anytime Jesus declares a value, then we are to speak sameness.

We are to speak the same thing. We value what he values. Jesus, for instance, valued the inner man.

As we have seen, most people value the outer man. Jesus valued the spiritual. Most people value the material.

Jesus put a tremendous value upon agape, unconditional love at the end of Matthew chapter 5. Do you speak sameness with Jesus on that? Do you say the same thing about love that he says? That it should be God-like love? That it should be unconditional love? That we should love people not solely because of their performance. We should love people without conditions. We should love people the same way that first Corinthians 13 describes love.

We should work that out in our relationships. When we do that, and we have love for the brother and for the adversary and for the opposite sex and for our wives, our husbands, for evil persons and enemies as well as neighbors. Then we are speaking sameness with Jesus.

The values of Christ are a phenomena of sorts when compared to the value system of man. I challenge you to look at the second half of Matthew 6 and discover the values of Christ and realize as a part of our upward look, we need to look up until we know what the values of God and of Christ are. Then we need to speak sameness or agree with God and with Christ about those values.

Again remember the context, the strategy of this teaching. There is that multitude at the bottom of the mountain with all their problems. All this teaching is given to people on the mountaintop who can look down and see the multitudes and all their problems.

All this teaching is trying to show us how by the grace of God we can be part of the solution to all that mess down there. How we can be part of God's answer to all those problems down there. As we look at the second half of Matthew 6, this is what we discover.

One of the reasons those people have so many problems is because they don't have the right values. They don't have the values of God and the values of Christ. Jesus says that the way you communicate a value is to go down there and demonstrate that value.

Values are caught more than they are taught. So you have to demonstrate values. That's why Jesus spent 33 years in this world.

Not just a Friday afternoon when he died on the cross for the sins of the world. He's the truth. He's the life.

He demonstrated it for us and a lot of that had to do with the values he demonstrated. As we look at the spiritual disciplines in the first half of Matthew 6, the first one we see is giving. Be careful that you do not do your alms before men to be seen of them.

Acts of righteousness they are called. Some would call them acts of charity. Again look at the contrast here as you did in chapter 5. Between the religious establishment and the teaching of Jesus.

The religious establishment as we have said had a kind of righteousness but it was self-righteousness. It was not the kind of righteousness that Jesus wanted his disciples to have. Many people think that when you go through these last six paragraphs of Matthew chapter 5, Jesus was watering down the law of Moses or that he was saying he was better than Moses.

But as we have seen Jesus was not doing that at all. He was saying to his disciples as he gave that teaching in Matthew chapter 5, everything I am going to teach you is going to agree with scripture. But it's not going to agree with the religious establishment.

The way they teach the scripture. The way they interpret the scripture. The way they apply it.

But it will agree with the spirit of the word, the purpose of the word, the principle of the word. With what God had on his heart when he gave that word. In connection with making that kind of statement, Jesus said your righteousness must surpass the righteousness of scribes and Pharisees or you do not really understand what I am teaching.

Matthew chapter 5 verse 20. We're really getting into the heart of that now as we get into chapter 6. Because he is really going to contrast the righteousness of his disciples with the righteousness of the religious establishment. It's hard for us to believe it today but the religious establishment, the scribes and the Pharisees actually had a custom of going out on the street corners at noon when the streets were very

crowded and they would blow a little trumpet which they kept in their cloaks.

When the crowd turned around to see what the noise was they would very conspicuously drop a coin into a beggars cup. Jesus looks at that and says hypocrite. That word hypocrite meant false face, actor, pretender.

The hypocrite was an actor in the Greek theater. To represent the character they were portraying they wore a mask, a false face. That is what the word hypocrite literally means.

Jesus is saying that the motivation for that giving as he sees the coin drop into the beggars cup after the trumpet is blown was simply this, to be seen by men so that men would think that the givers were generous. That is why they put that coin into the beggars cup, to be honored by men. Well men saw that and if that was the motivation for giving then the reward was received in full because that is all the reward they really wanted, only the honor of men, for men to see them giving and think of them as generous and pious and good.

Well they got the reward because that's what they wanted and the reward was experienced in full. But Jesus is saying in Matthew chapter 6 that is hypocritical righteousness. The righteousness I want you to have is not to be hypocritical, it's to be real, a real righteousness, a righteousness that is not horizontal like that.

It's not as unto men but before men, to be seen of men, to receive praise and honor from men, that is horizontal righteousness. Jesus says the righteousness I want you to have should be vertical. Your giving should be as unto God, not as unto men.

Therefore when you give, no man needs to see what you give. As a matter of fact, Jesus said this, don't let your right hand know what your left hand is giving. My what a beautiful truth he is teaching here.

Of course we cannot understand these scribes and Pharisees actually blowing a trumpet and doing this ridiculous thing on the street corner. But I wonder by application if we're not guilty of the same thing. It's said that one of the most wonderful experiences you can have is to give a large gift anonymously and then be discovered.

Why is it important to be discovered? It's because we still have this pharisaical religious establishment kind of attitude. Our righteousness still has a need to be horizontal rather than vertical in the area of giving. I've been amazed as a pastor at how frequently people, especially when they give substantial gifts, will not merely put the offering in the offering plate like everybody else.

Rather they will mail it to the pastor because they want the pastor to know that they have given this gift. I've always been a bit disappointed when that happens because it's made me realize that these people need to grow some more in the area of giving, especially as it has to do with righteousness being horizontal or vertical. Giving should be as unto the Lord and not as unto men.

I learned that lesson in the first church that I pastored. I had started a church in a little white house. The first day there were about 20 people who came.

My wife was in the hospital and she was critically ill with our first child. The doctors could not even tell me whether or not she was going to make it. When the time came to preach the first sermon the very first Sunday in that little white house, my wife encouraged me to go and I did.

All the way to that little church, which was some distance from the hospital, the devil attacked me with doubts and reminded me of what a fool I was to step out on faith and offer to pastor these people when it didn't even seem they were going to support me or my wife. I will never forget that I had asked a man who was going to be our treasurer in that little church to show me at the end of the day on a little slip of paper how much the offering was. Not who had given how much, but rather only how much the offering was.

When he showed me the little slip that morning after the first church service, it was a tremendous amount of money. I will never forget it. And I looked at him, and he was not a real educated man, so I said, I think you must not have added the money properly.

That's far too much. He smiled and he said, No, sir. Why, that saintly old lady who sits in the back of the church gave almost every bit of it.

I was standing on the porch of that little house when that saintly old lady came out, and as I shook her hand, I said, I want to thank you for putting that wonderful gift in the offering plate. She looked at me as if she were angry, and she said, I don't know how you knew about that. I did not give that money to you.

I gave it to God, and it was none of your business. And with that, she turned on her heel and marched off that porch. And I stood there as a young pastor, having been rebuked, but thoroughly edified.

I had learned something. When people give, they're giving as unto God, not as unto men, not even as unto a pastor. And what they give is between themselves and God.

That is what Jesus really meant when he said, Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is giving. You should be giving unto God. It should be as unto God only.

Giving is a very important spiritual discipline, according to the scripture. When I started there as a pastor, I remember telling my wife that I was never going to preach a sermon on money. I did that because I had heard so many stories where a family would try to get the dad in the family to go to Sunday morning church services.

And on the one day that they got him to come, the preacher preached about money. And so I had personally vowed I would never do that. But I had to go back on that immature promise because I had discovered by studying the scripture and by shepherding people that a person's spiritual well-being is directly related to their faithfulness in the area of giving.

Giving is a spiritual discipline. When people give as they should, God blesses that. God will certainly bless them spiritually.

I do not believe they are necessarily going to be blessed in the way of financial prosperity. I do not believe that is always true. In very difficult parts of this world where they don't have religious freedom, sometimes people are thrown into prison for giving.

It doesn't always work out that we have financial prosperity just because we give. And he withdraws from them the true riches, the spiritual blessings. If they are unfaithful in the area of giving, if you study the values of Jesus Christ and hear him teach as in Luke 16 on the subject of stewardship, we see that it involves not only money, but time, energy, gifts, and talents, and all the things that make up a human being's life.

If you hear Jesus say, he that is faithful in that which is least will be faithful in that which is much. And if you are faithful in the way you deal with the money of unrighteousness, God will commit to your trust the true riches. But if you are not faithful in this area, then you will become spiritually bankrupt.

That's essentially what he teaches in places like Luke 16. If that's true, and I am convinced that it is, then as a pastor who is responsible for the spiritual well-being of people, how could you never speak on the subject of stewardship? Not only of money, but of time, energy, talents, and life. In most of our cultures, money is what we have to show for the way we spend our time, energy, and our talent.

And so it's a very important subject in the scripture, our money, and our faithful stewardship of our money, which represents things like how we spend our time, energy, and talent. So giving according to the scripture is a spiritual discipline, and it's very important to get into the discipline of giving to realize that it's supposed to be vertical, not horizontal. We are to give as unto the Lord, and it's nobody's business what we give.

If we have a need to make it their business, then I think we need to grow in the area of vertical righteousness. The opening verse of Matthew 6 is a general statement. Then it's spelled out and applied in different ways as the chapter progresses.

But the opening statement is take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men to be seen by them. That's the theme that's going to be followed through when Jesus teaches the spiritual disciplines of giving, praying, and fasting. In all three of these spiritual disciplines, the emphasis will be upon this fact.

It must be vertical, not horizontal. To God, not as unto men. As we get into the spiritual discipline of giving, I would like to challenge you to trace the subject through the scripture and see what a spiritual discipline giving can be.

God needs no measurement of commitment on our part, but we do. One of the ways God has provided for us as a standard of measurement so that we can know where we are in our commitment to him is the spiritual discipline of giving. Is it possible to say God is first in my life? I have no other gods before him, but God cannot have my money? Of course that's impossible.

The tithe was instituted as a standard of measurement so people would know if God was first. The tithe was not only a tenth, it was the first tenth. But as we will see, giving is more important than just the tithe.

Our giving is a great indication of where we are spiritually. That's why Jesus gets into the teaching about looking upward and having spiritual disciplines. The first thing he mentions is giving.

Vertical giving. Giving is unto the Lord. Giving before the Lord.

Giving to the Lord our life and all the things that our life represents. God bless you until next time. I have been challenged by today's lesson, and I trust you have too.

Be sure to join us next time, and may I remind you that it is never too late to invite others to join us here in the Mini Bible College. Now, until we meet again, may our Lord and Savior guard your hearts and encourage you to trust him and follow him faithfully each day. May he fill you with his peace and hope as you experience and share his grace.

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