

## **LOOKING BACK ON CHAPTER 5**

Well, dear folks, we have finished the first chapter of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in our “Kingdom Constitution” sermon series. And before we commence with our study of Matthew, Chapter 6, it would be prudent to look briefly from whence we have come, for it will greatly help inform where we will be going! To use the familiar metaphor, let us examine “the forest” (the whole) that we might better understand our study of “the trees” (the specifics) of the forest.

Matthew, Chapter 6, begins with yet another reference to “righteousness” – this time *“practicing your righteousness.”* So let us track the three uses of “righteousness” we encountered in Chapter 5. And remember that “righteousness” can most easily be understood as that which is pleasing to God, or is “right” in His eyes.

1. First, we saw “righteousness” at the end of the first half of the Beatitudes, where Jesus taught *“blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”* He was teaching that as we desire and strive to be pleasing to God He will reward our pursuit with fulfillment and blessing.
2. Then we saw “righteousness” again at the end of the second half of the Beatitudes, where Jesus taught that when we pursue righteousness, thus pleasing God, we will surely be persecuted for that godly pursuit. But our blessing, or reward, will be “member in good standing” in God’s kingdom. So the Beatitudes are closely tied with pursuing and practicing righteousness.
3. Following the Beatitudes we were taught that as Kingdom citizens we are to be salt and light to the world. This could be considered the general and metaphorical charge to “live out” our righteousness in the world in which we abide. And in 5:20 Jesus makes an important assertion when for the third time in chapter 5 He uses the word “righteousness.” He teaches: *“unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”* And then he proceeds to sight six examples from the Old Testament Law that must be interpreted down to the heart of the matter rather than just to the letter of the Law. He “raises the bar” on God’s expectation of righteous living to the “nth” degree when he concludes Chapter 5 with *“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* Our righteousness must be His righteousness and nothing less.

So we have been challenged to pursue righteousness, even to the point of persecution for it, and to exceed the righteousness of the Jewish religious leaders, possible only with total dependence upon Jesus as the perfect source of our righteousness. And, righteousness yields spiritual reward.

So how do we practically pursue and practice this elusive righteousness? Well, the opening 18 verses of Matthew 6, tell us. And the opening verse gives us an overall summary of the matter.

## **CHAPTER 6, VERSE 1 – THE OVERARCHING PRINCIPLE OF RIGHTEOUS LIVING**

**Matthew 6:1** *Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.*

Here Jesus returns to the theme of “righteousness,” so clearly emphasized in Chapter 5. I want us to notice 3 obvious points of interest and teaching that apply to verses 2-18.

- 1. RIGHTEOUSNESS IS TO BE PRACTICED**
- 2. THERE IS A SERIOUS WARNING IN PRACTICING IMPROPERLY**
- 3. EARTHLY RIGHTEOUSNESS BRINGS HEAVENLY REWARD**

Let’s examine these in turn.

## 1. RIGHTEOUSNESS PRACTICED!

Don't miss this important point. Yes, Jesus is warning about the improper practice of righteousness, which we will address in a moment. But in teaching of the improper practice, He is also making the point that righteousness must be rightly practiced. Many wrongly see "practicing righteousness" as living by law and not by the Spirit. They say that the follower of Christ must simply keep his eyes on Jesus and "walk in the Spirit." True – but how is this practically done?

In verses 2-18, Jesus will teach on the 3 keys to righteous living: (1) acts of human kindness (or giving of alms), (2) conversation with God (prayer), and (3) personal self-restraint (fasting). I say "the" 3 keys because they correlate exactly with the 3 keys or pillars of Judaism:

1. **TZEDAKAH** – service in acts of human kindness; almsgiving to aid the needy (we will see this emphasis in verses 2-4)
2. **TELFILLAH** – (literally, "to focus") interfacing with God in prayer; conforming one's will to God's will (we will see this emphasis in verses 5-15)
3. **TESHUVA** – self restraint; self-reflection; self-examination; designated denial, including fasting, in order to subjugate oneself to the Sovereignty of God (we will see this emphasis in verses 16-18)

These were (and are) the Jewish pillars of righteousness to be practiced, and Jesus teaches that these are the Christian disciplines of righteousness that we must practice.

## 2. RIGHTEOUSNESS WARNING!

The warning in 6:1 is clear from the opening word: "beware!" These disciplines are NOT to be practiced in such a way that they draw attention to self in such a way to be noticed by others. Yes, we are to be salt and light so as to be felt and seen – but in such a way that brings "*glory [to] your Father who is in heaven,*" (5:16) not glory to self.

"Beware" is only found a dozen times in the New Testament, and every time but this one in referring to the sin (leaven) of the scribes and Pharisees. This is the ONLY "beware" referring to an improper Christian practice – that is, of "practicing our righteousness" so as to be noticed, complimented and rewarded (in full). It bears special attention that we must carefully avoid any practice or pretense of "attention getting" or "man pleasing" in our spirituality. And the "beware" implies that the danger is very real and very subtle. Pride is a sneaky sin for which Satan has long been known, and long wanted to pass on to God's children.

The emphasis on these 3 disciplines of righteousness is secrecy – secret giving (v.3-4), secret prayer (v.6) and secret fasting (v.18). None of these can ever be completely secret, but we must strive to do them so as not to draw attention to ourselves.

## 3. RIGHTEOUSNESS REWARD!

Many struggle with the concept of reward for our righteousness. "I only want the reward of God's smile," we might humbly say. "I don't deserve any reward – it's all of Jesus," we proclaim. "Just making it into heaven will be enough – I don't need anything more than being with God," we feel.

And rightly. All our righteousness is by and for Him alone. But God makes it clear here and in numerous other Scriptures that rewards await in heaven for righteous living. What those rewards are exactly remain unclear. We are not to work motivated by reward, and yet the truth is that actions in this life will clearly affect the heavenly consequences of the next.

**2 Corinthians 5:10** *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

## 6:2-4 – THE DISCIPLINE OF BENEVOLENT GIVING

Having noted the overarching principle of righteous living – that is, practicing it not to be noticed by others – we move on to consider the first of the 3 pillars or keys to righteous living: the discipline of benevolent giving, or as it is often translated (mirroring the similar Jewish pillar), giving of alms.

**Matthew 6:2-4** *So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*

## **1. GIVE TO AID THE NEEDY**

Verse 2 and 3 begin “*when you give to the poor*” implying that this is what you should be doing. Question: are you a giver? More specifically, are you a generous giver of your resources? Jesus expects His kingdom citizens to be generous givers. This is the first pillar or key to righteous living. And it mirrors the TZEDAKAH of the Jewish religion – the giving of alms.

Scripture teaches that this giving should begin with the “tithe” or “tenth” to the “storehouse” (Malachi 3:10) which I take to mean the local church in which you minister and where you receive ministry. I can’t in good faith teach a lesson on benevolent giving without mentioning this critical principle.

**Malachi 3:10** *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.”*

And then beyond the tithe we are to give offerings to benefit the needy. Though we can give to individuals as we are led, the best way is to give to charitable organizations. Many in our own community come immediately to mind: Network Medical, Santa Barbara Rescue Mission, Unity Shoppe, Salvation Army, Child Evangelism Fellowship, Gideons, and many more. And our giving need not be only in money, but in food and clothing items and in service to help.

National/international organizations abound who do wonderful work for God’s kingdom, well deserving of our support. Samaritan’s Purse, Compassion International, Food for the Hungry and World Vision are the largest, but also the most effective in their reach. Prison Fellowship and Kairos are two of the largest and most effective Christian ministries to those in prison.

And of course there are Christian orphanages around the globe that depend upon the benevolent support of kingdom citizens to save and protect the orphaned and abused children.’

## **2. GIVE NOT TO BE NOTICED BY OTHERS**

Yes, the church and organization’s treasurer will know of your gifts. And so will your tax preparer. And if you are married, your spouse should certainly share in your giving. But Jesus’ clear admonishment is to give without receiving honor or notice. He wants our motive to be purely to help. Don’t make a habit of mentioning your giving habits. Just do it. God knows, and is pleased.

## **3. GIVE SPONTANEOUSLY, LED BY THE SPIRIT**

For me that’s the best interpretation of “*do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.*” To accomplish that literally is impossible, but it speaks to not carefully calculating every act of giving, but giving extravagantly and generously as the Spirit leads, sometimes without foresight. And it speaks to thinking about what God wants me to give more than how much I can afford to give. And it speaks to even surprising yourself as to where and when you give. It speaks to giving led by the heart more than led by the mind.

That doesn’t mean we are foolish in our giving, but lavish – just like the woman who anointed Jesus with costly perfume. She didn’t count the cost as much as value the recipient of the gift. And, as it is so often said, “you can’t out-give God.” If He impresses upon your heart to give to help a need, we must not resist but joyously yield, knowing that He will always provide the resources.

## **4. GOD’S REWARD WILL COME**

If we seek the reward of men's notice, that is our full reward (v. 2) But God, who sees in secret will reward in His good way in His good time. Count on it.