

## ***Treasure, Week 3***

### **GIVING YOUR TREASURE BACK TO GOD Matthew 6:1-6**

Today is week 3 of a series called *Treasure*. This series is based on the words of Jesus in Matthew 6 – “Store your treasure in heaven, for where your treasure is there your heart will be also.”

I hope that throughout this series you’ve been thinking and praying about two questions

- 1. Where do I *want* to invest my time, money, and energy?**
- 2. Where am I *really* investing my time, money, and energy?**

My bet is that if you and I have answered those questions honestly, we’ve found some level of discrepancy between our answers. My hope is that during this series you and I have done some work that will help us close the gap between our answers.

Speaking for myself: I’ve done a lot of thinking about how I use my time, and I’ve made some *painful* decisions to drop some things in order to have time for things that are more important. And Lorie and I have looked at our finances – and we’ve made some decisions about what we’re going to give in 2016.

My hope is that through this series your answers to the two questions are getting closer together.

#### **Today’s Scripture starts in Matthew 6, verse 1**

*“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.”*

*--Matthew 6:1 NRSV*

Here’s a question I’ve been struggling with throughout this series: What does Jesus mean by rewards?

- 4 times in this chapter Jesus talks about being rewarded by God
- If you count the stuff about treasures in heaven, then it’s 5 times

So what is the reward?

- Is it like the story of a taxi driver and a preacher who got to heaven at the same time? An angel met them at the gate and said, “Welcome to heaven! Here is your reward.” The taxi driver was given a silk robe and a golden staff and a crown full

of star. But the preacher only received a cotton robe and a wooden staff and a crown with only a few stars. The preacher said, "Hey! Why is his reward so much greater than mine?" And the angel replied, "Because here in heaven we look at results. And the truth is, when you preached people slept. But when this guy drove his taxi, people *prayed* like never before!"

- Or is it like the story about three men who got to heaven at the same time? The angel met them at the gate and said, "Welcome to heaven! You will each receive a car to drive based on how faithful you were to your wife." To the first man he said, "You never once cheated on your wife. Your reward is a Rolls Royce!" To the second man he said, "You were unfaithful two times. You get a Honda CRV." To the third man he said, "You were unfaithful quite a few times. You must drive an old beat up Volkswagen for all eternity."

The next day the second two guys came across the first fellow sitting in his Rolls Royce crying his eyes out. "What's the matter?" they said, "You got the best car." "Yes," he blubbered. "But I just saw my wife go by on a roller skate!"

- Or is it like this (and this is a more serious story). A very wealthy man who was a Christian, but lived life focused on himself and never did much for others, died and went to heaven. The angel met him at the gate and said, "Follow me and I will take you to your eternal dwelling." Along the way the angel pointed to a huge mansion and said, "That's where your maid lives." They passed another huge mansion, and the angel said, "That's where your chauffeur lives." Finally they came to a tar paper shack. The angel said, "Here. This is your dwelling place." The rich man was upset and asked why his house was so sparse. And the angel replied, "I'm sorry, sir, but we build each person's house out of the materials you send up here during your lifetime. And this is all you sent us to work with."

Jesus said, "*Your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*" So what does that mean?

I think one answer, and probably the most important answer, is in today's Scripture, so let's keep going. And as we work through this Scripture, **I'm going to show you 3 things from Matthew 6:1-6**, and then we'll circle back around and look at the question of rewards.

**First thing: Look at verse 2—**"*So whenever you give...*

STOP. The first thing to see is that **Jesus expects you to GIVE.**

- Giving is part and parcel of the Christian life

- I talked about this last week. Stewardship is not about the church's need to receive – it's about your and my need to give

**Second thing: Look at verse 5—** *“And whenever you pray...”*

STOP. The second thing to see is that **Jesus expects you to PRAY.**

- Prayer is part and parcel of the Christian life
- Phillip Graham Ryken said, “Prayer does not simply *maintain* the Christian life; it *is* the Christian life.”

So, #1, Jesus expects you to give

#2, Jesus expects you to pray

**And now, number 3 – Jesus wants you to do those things for the right reason!**

*Verse 2: So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others.*

Now, I've never seen any of you blowing a trumpet before you put your gift in the offering plate on Sunday. But I still wonder how many of you might be giving for the **wrong** reasons?

-Maybe you're giving out of **guilt**. *That's the wrong reason.*

If you're giving because you feel guilty, and then you put something in the plate and your guilt goes away, then guess what – you've already received your reward.

-Maybe you're giving out of **pressure**. *That's the wrong reason.*

-Maybe you're giving out of dreary sense of **obligation**:

- “The church has done something for me, so I guess I have to do something for the church.”
- “The pastor came to visit me, so I guess I better give some money.”

*That's the wrong reason.*

- Maybe you're giving because you're thinking, "I need to do my **fair share** so I can feel good about myself."

*That's the wrong reason.*

And there are also wrong reasons to pray! Look at verse 5: *And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.*

Again: I've never seen any of you up on the square in front of Fitz's praying out loud for everybody to hear you. But I still wonder how many of you might be praying for the wrong reasons.

- Maybe the **only time you ever pray is when you want something**. God is your celestial Santa Claus, or your heavenly vending machine.

*That's the wrong reason.*

- Maybe you pray for a few minutes in the morning so that you can **feel religious**. "OK, I've done my religious duty, now I can go do my own thing."

*That's the wrong reason.*

- Or maybe you really do pray only **to impress people** because the only time you pray is when you're at the church and people can see you.

I guess that's better than nothing, but *it's still the wrong reason*.

### **So what is the right reason to give? And what is the right reason to pray?**

The answer is found in a word that is used 12 times in Matthew 6—a word that unlocks this chapter and all the references that it makes—a word that only Jesus dared to use in reference to God.

You see, the religious people of Jesus' day knew God only as a mysterious, powerful, wrathful and frightening Deity. They understood God to have a name, but it was too sacred, too holy to even pronounce. They could not imagine approaching God without the proper rituals and sacrifices and religious ceremonies

-So in that atmosphere, try to imagine how radical it was when Jesus called God **Father**.

Look at verses 3-4: *But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your **Father** who sees in secret will reward you.*

Listen:

- You don't give to be seen
- You don't give out of guilt
- You don't give out of pressure
- You don't give out of obligation, or legalism, or to feel like you're worth something

You give because you love your Father. You give as part of a **Relationship**.

And look at verse 6: *But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

AGAIN:

- You don't pray to be seen.
- You don't pray just to get things.
- You don't pray just to be religious.

You pray because you love your Father. You pray as part of a **Relationship**.

There are so many ways that giving and prayer tie into a relationship with God.

- Giving draws me close to God
- Prayer draws me close to God
  - o Giving is a way of showing love to God
  - o Prayer is a way of showing love to God
- If I love God, then I will pray for God's will to be done
- And if I love God, I will give for God's work to be done

Prayer, when it's more than just my own grocery list, makes me more like God because I'm focusing on other people.

Giving, when it's from the heart, makes me more like God, because **God is a giver**. What's the next word in this sentence? *"For God so loved the world that he..."*

There are lots of bad reasons to give and lots of bad reasons to pray, but there's only one good reason, and it's this:

Because I love my Father. It's all about RELATIONSHIP.

**And I think that's the answer to the question of rewards.**

I think, when you get right down to it,

The Relationship is the Reward.

When I pray and give for the right reasons, the reward is that *I get closer to God:*

- I grow spiritually

- My faith gets stronger

(1 Peter says that faith is more precious than gold!)

*That's an awesome reward.*

But there's more: As my faith goes up, my fear goes down (very important in times like these).

- My stress goes down
- My frustration with life goes down

*That's an awesome reward.*

But there's more: As I grow spiritually, my commitment to God gets deeper, and I become more like Jesus.

*That's an awesome reward.*

But there's more. When I pray and give for the right reasons, and I grow closer to God

I get better at listening to God

and that means I get better at doing the things God wants me to do,

and that means I experience more of the joy of serving God.

*That's an awesome reward.*

But there's still more: When I pray and give for the right reasons,

and I get closer to God,

and I end up doing more of the things God wants me to do,

Then I get to the end of my life and I come to realize I've invested my life in things that matter.

In other words: *I've stored up treasure in heaven.*

*And that is an awesome reward.*

So...

#1- Jesus expects you to give

#2- Jesus expects you to pray

#3 -Jesus wants you to do those things for the right reason

And when you pray and give for the right reasons, the reward is a stronger relationship with God—

And that has value for all eternity.