

## RECEIVE OUR FATHER'S RICH REWARD

Matthew 6:1-6

**TEXT:** *Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 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. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

We are a society that is obsessed with cultivating self-esteem. Last summer I went to a ball game where two of my grandchildren were playing. With a sheepish grin and blush of hesitation, my daughter came up to me before the game with a warning that there is no score keeping at these games, and that no strikes are called. Rather the child is allowed to swing away until they get a hit and then are always called safe at first. They say that you can't feel high blood pressure, but I know that I could feel mine going up a few notches. I drove all the way to Detroit to watch Yuppie baseball. All the little kids felt good about themselves, but no one was learning anything about baseball or life. That is the world we are living in.

How can a society that teaches self-esteem ever understand Jesus' Sermon on the Mount that calls for the exact opposite? It's NOT about me! It's all about serving my God and Lord who sees not only what I do, but assesses the motivation lying deep in my heart in regard to what it is that I do! This is what God rewards! These words from that famous sermon urge us to see this clearly, and to RECEIVE OUR FATHER'S RICH REWARD. His rich reward is yours in Jesus' name; and His rich reward is seen in your selfless living.

Once again our Lord slams us with God's Law: *Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. ... And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.*

Here is another reminder of the total depravity, the complete corruption, of the Old Adam. For who doesn't feel the desire to be appreciated for the good things we do? Who doesn't feel good about himself when he makes it to church? Who doesn't feel good when he gives, perhaps actually sacrifices, in order to give an offering to the Church? Have you even felt the secret desire that others might know and appreciate your generous offering and that they should take an example from you on how to sacrifice? But if doing, giving, loving and sacrificing is done only to have that good feeling, if that is the motivation, then there is no reward. Jesus declares that if that if feeling good about what we are doing, especially in the eyes of others, then that's all the reward you're ever going to get from God! *I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.* That's all you're going to get before you go to hell forever.

Bible says: ***The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*** 1 Sa 16 That goes for this man standing here before you this morning. The outward appearance is so important to me because my Old Adam is self-righteous and finds his only comfort in feeling good about myself while worrying about what others think of me. What Paul writes about himself in his letter to the Romans, once again, applies to this portion of Jesus' sermon: ***But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. ... but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.*** Ro 7 Paul says: "I was doing OK until this Jesus came by with the Law of God, looking directly into my heart and the motives of my mind. Then, suddenly my selfish motives are exposed for what they are!" Imagine if the Lord, the Giver of every good and perfect gift, appeared to watch you fill your offering envelope. How would it change the amount that you would give? Would you FEEL that you ought to up it a little? Would you FEEL you ought to explain your particular level of generosity? Would you FEEL satisfied?

Oh, how I would hate and despise this Sermon on the Mount if it weren't for the reward God has given me purely out of His grace and mercy! It is the forgiveness of sins purchased and won for me and all mankind by Jesus' death on the cross! It is the forgiveness of sins that is mine by virtue of the promise God makes in Holy Baptism. There I was, 64 years ago, a little sinner who could not even feed himself, and yet the cool water of Baptism carried with it the promise of forgiveness. And Scripture says that as the water wetted my tiny forehead, the Holy Spirit entered my heart with the power of regeneration and renewal. You also know and possess this gracious gift, and one day very soon, you and I and all who believe in Jesus are going to hear these words: ***Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.*** Mt 25 This is His richest reward given to you in Jesus' name!

Possession of this reward of faith is then seen by others in SELFLESS living.

You've already heard me say that doing anything only because it makes you feel good is, in and of itself, a selfish motivation. It is sinful motivation. Even the ungodly can have a sincere love for their family and children and do what God wants us to do for one another. But that's only because this is a gratification of their own love and desire. An ungodly soldier may possess a love for his country, only because he loves his country.

But let it be that anything is done ONLY for the Lord, and that's where you stand out as someone different. Let the ungodly fall out of love with his spouse and he will get a divorce even though the Lord tells us not to separate, but to fall back into love. Let the ungodly come to church, but if there isn't enough to make him feel good he stay home, even though the Lord wants our worship and praise. It's all about them and how they feel rather than what the Lord wants.

You are different, however, in that your faith in Jesus and His promise of forgiveness that is His richest reward produces a motivation that only you have. It is an awareness of God as Savior and King that makes your prayers so personal and focused on that grace of God that you find Jesus' advice most helpful: ***... when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father,***

*who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.* Yes! You already know that! Private conversation with your Heavenly Father who answers your prayers in a way that will cause others to wonder about how all things seem to work together for good, for you and for others! And when you live your life in service for your Lord and for others, it will be just as Jesus says: *...your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.* And even while you already have the reward of heaven, and even though you don't serve God and others only to make yourself feel good, another reward to you from God is that you will feel better than "GOOD." You will feel the joy and peace of God that surpasses all understanding.

What a gracious God who rewards you through Jesus in all your Christian living!  
Amen