

Sermons on Matthew

Laying Up Treasures

Matthew 6:1-6; 16-21

With Study Questions

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10/2/2004*

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Preface

You will notice that I have excluded the Lord's Prayer from this message. I have done this for a couple of reasons: first, it is taught by Jesus here parenthetically and I would like to focus on what appears to be His main point. Secondly, the Lord's Prayer deserves its own thoughtful examination which we will pursue in our next lesson.

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. ⁻²⁻ 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. ⁻³⁻ But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁻⁴⁻ that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret __will Himself reward you __openly. ⁻⁵⁻ “_And when you pray, you shall not be like the __hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ⁻⁶⁻ But you, when you pray, __go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you __openly...

¹⁶⁻ **_Moreover, __when you fast, do not be like the __hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ⁻¹⁷⁻ But you, when you fast, __anoint your head and wash your face, ⁻¹⁸⁻ so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you _openly. ⁻¹⁹⁻ _Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ⁻²⁰⁻ __but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ⁻²¹⁻ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:1-6; 16-21).**

Introduction

Manipulation has always been a predominant theme in man's relationship with man. Guilt, riches, serenity, power, notoriety and

outright brute force are all potential players when a person, or a group of people, are seeking to manipulate others. And manipulation often reaches its zenith in the various religions of the world.

An incensed Roman Catholic monk named Martin Luther reacted to this in 1517 when he had had about enough of His church's gouging of its people through a thing called *indulgences* (gifts given to the church). Presumably these indulgences would shorten the amount of time loved ones would have to spend in purgatory. It was a very effective and lucrative program.

Other than the brute force method of manipulation, manipulators can only be effective if they are offering some form reciprocation (a reward). Manipulation doesn't work unless there is a carrot hanging in the offing. With indulgences the reciprocation was the extraction of a loved one from the refining purgatorial flames. But generally, the promised reciprocation for certain behavior is much more subtle.

The reciprocation a manipulator depends upon can be as nuanced as a little notoriety or self-contentment. If a manipulator can leave his victim walking on the fence of insecurity, he can assuredly get him to jump through the manipulative hoops necessary to receive the desired 'atta boys. Over the years I've seen manipulative spouses (some willful, some perhaps not) hang the promise of a serene household over their nerve-racked husband or wife.

What we all need to know about manipulation is that it only works with a promise of reciprocation or reward—and this reward often involves some kind of psychological, emotional or spiritual tranquility.

The Pharisees (the religious leaders during the time of Christ) were master manipulators. Jesus said of them,

...they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men's shoulders (Matthew 23:4).

Jesus had quite the opposite to say of Himself,

Take My yoke upon you _and learn from Me, for I am __gentle and __lowly in heart, _and you will find rest for your souls. ⁻³⁰⁻ __For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11:29, 30).

So the burdensome carrot-dangling yoke (that which attached a beast of burden to its plow or cart of labor) of the Pharisees was to be replaced by the gentle, restful, burden-free attachment to Jesus.

Christians are to be so spiritually and psychologically detached from the notion of worldly reciprocation that even in our jobs, where we expect our due wages, we shouldn't think of ourselves as working for our employers but for God (Colossians 3:22-25).

I labor this manipulation/ reciprocation issue in order to make a point in light of the current instruction of Christ. It is woven into our very nature to desire reciprocation and God surely promises this in heaps. One merely need look at the beatitudes (Blessed are the...for they shall receive...) to see reciprocations galore. Later in Matthew Jesus will encourage His followers saying,

-_And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother __or wife or children or __lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:29).

Am I suggesting that God is some divine manipulator holding out a carrot of heavenly and eternal blessings? Certainly not! Ungodly manipulation is self-serving with little or no concern for the victim's welfare or character. God is no manipulator in that sense. He is rather to be thought of as a parent seeking to raise His children properly then rewarding them for proper behavior that He has trained them in.

God Or Men?

So there are two questions before us this morning: Just who is it you're trying to impress and what are you expecting to gain? Now before you give the bedraggled 60's answer that you're not trying to impress anyone and you don't expect to gain anything, try to be self-conscious enough to know that you've taken great comfort in that mere thought, which means you've been overtaken with the natural impulse of impressing yourself, and what you've gained is a stroke for your own ego. So Please!

Will you be manipulated by the world or nurtured by God? Will you be satisfied with the rewards of the world or would you prefer the heavenly reward promised by your heavenly Father?

The Loveliest Evil People

Now I am going to say something very dangerous here and I don't want to be misunderstood. I realize that as husbands, wives, parents, friends, elders, deacons, pastors and neighbors we are generally not seeking to be evil manipulators. I also realize that we can and should encourage one another and be encouraged by one another. But having said that I must also state that if you're looking for your reward/ reciprocation even from the loveliest people in your life, you are walking a fence of idolatry.

I say this for two reasons. First in the light of Jesus' words,

_If a son asks for __bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? ⁻¹²⁻ Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? ⁻¹³⁻ If you then, being evil, know how to give __good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him (Luke 11:11-13)!

Even though parents know how to give good gifts, they cannot escape, at least in some sense, being evil. So a loving parent, recognizing this, will always seek to lead their children to prioritize Christ in their thoughts and affections.

Secondly, later in this sermon Jesus will teach,

_No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other (Matthew 6:24).

So even though I might enjoy words of praise and encouragement from my wife, children and members of the congregation, I can never let man's (even good man's) praise to reach an unhealthy level of priority in my life. Imagine if Moses' primary motivation for leading the people in the wilderness had been their words and letters of encouragement! I am pretty sure he would have been looking for another congregation.

We are to love and serve our spouses and children—love and serve our neighbors—because of the great love God has for us. And we are to look for His reward

Godly Piety

Jesus previously gave six examples of law keeping (Matthew 5:21-48) which genuine Christians are to pursue both inwardly and outwardly. Jesus moves now to give three examples of genuine godly piety, or righteousness. His examples are acts of charity, prayer and fasting—although the moral of Christ’s lesson applies to all Christian behavior.

I don’t intend, at this point, to launch into an in-depth study of proper charity, prayer and fasting since this does not seem to be the point Jesus is seeking to make. I will say, however, that our Lord assumes these things to be, at some level, the practice of His followers. Christians are commanded, not only to tithe, but to care for the poor (Luke 14:13), to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and fast on proper or necessary occasions (Acts 13:2).

These three examples, over and above the law examples, show how easily men can be overtaken with a desire to receive the kudos of other men...*even in the very devotions which are designed for, and (presumably) directed to, God!*

“Take heed...” Jesus taught, “...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.

There we have His message in a nutshell. In our charitable deeds we will either receive rewards from God or men but not both.

“To be seen” in verse one is the Greek word *theathe_nai* from which we get our word *theatrical*. In verse two Jesus continues,

Therefore, __when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues

The word hypocrite *hupokrites* was used to describe an actor in the theatre. So the genuine question for the genuine Christian is who is the audience...God or men?

One insidious enemy warring against the Christian’s quest to reserve the theatre seats for God alone is our inclination to take a seat ourselves. There is a fine line between the enjoyment of pleasing God and the enjoyment of self-satisfaction. Self-satisfaction is quite popular. Perhaps if

we say it three times out loud (I won't ask you to do this) the true repugnance of this concept may sink it. "I am satisfied with me...I am satisfied with me...I am satisfied with me" It seems like a pretty short leap to "praise me."

Jesus, clearly aware of our weakness in this area uses an illustration which is restricted to our own body. In verse three we read,

But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing

I would take this to mean that we shouldn't dwell on our own righteous deeds even in our own thoughts. Perhaps this is what the sheep succeeded in doing when they responded to Jesus' encouragement of their works on judgment day by saying,

—Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? ⁻³⁸⁻ When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? ⁻³⁹⁻ Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You (Matthew 25:37-39)?

Sometimes we Christians have a 'when will my ship come in?' mentality. We are waiting for someone or something to give us our due. This is very understandable for at least two reasons: one, our very nature demands it. Two, the Christian faith is often billed as such—presented like some sort of spiritual Bow-Flex designed to produce heavenly abs in six weeks or less.

But Christians are to patiently wait for their reward from God. It is hard to tell if Jesus is speaking of the heavenly rewards we might receive while still in this world like comfort or wisdom or rewards in heaven or the reward of heaven. Whatever and whenever it may come...it comes from God which makes it superior to all the alternatives.

We can test whether or not our charitable deeds, prayers, fasting or any other labor done for the Lord is truly for the Lord by evaluating just how frustrated we get when we don't receive sufficient praise from men. It is just this acknowledgment and praise from men which is the context for the following words.

**—Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ⁻²⁰⁻
—but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where**

neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ⁻²¹⁻ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19-21).

If you were a Noah, an Elijah or a Moses surrounded by faithlessness and persecution, would your treasure be gone? Would the moths and rust of fickle humanity rob you of your Christian integrity? Or do you recognize that your labor in the Lord is never in vain. Do you treasure the rewards of your heavenly Father over the rewards of fallen humanity? Have you, as Peter writes, sanctified “**Christ as Lord in your hearts**” (1 Peter 3:15). For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Questions for Study

1. What is necessary in order for manipulation to be effective (page 3)?
2. What is the difference between the way men manipulate and the way God nurtures (page 4)?
3. What are mankind’s two options in terms of who he will serve (page 4, 5)?
4. How can our closest loved ones become idols (pages 5, 6)?
5. Why do you suppose Jesus uses the examples of piety in this passage to make His point (page 6)?
6. Christians are to do good deeds in order to please whom (page 6)?
7. What do the phrases / word “To be seen” and “hypocrite” mean (page 7)?

8. How can we test whether or not we are waiting for our reward from God rather than men (page 8)?