

*Sermon on Matthew 6:1-18 prepared by Jonathan Shradar*

**Followers of Jesus reject self to serve our sovereign.**

The actor takes the stage and becomes someone else. She exudes foreign emotions. She moves with postures not her own. She speaks words that she did not choose or in the depths of her soul mean. But before the curtain is drawn there is applause. The praise of her audience for being something she is not.

The actor receives acclaim for performance, for who they pretend to be and how they do it. While taking the stage, or the screen, provides a stark example of being valued for something you are not, even the most authentic among us is tempted to do a little acting. To fit in. To receive some praise. To feel valued. To get likes...

When Jesus enters into our lives he graciously calls us away from the pretending and to something genuine, something better. The way of his Kingdom is not performance but being and these are differentiated by who we are serving.

**Matthew 6:1-18**

**Followers of Jesus reject self to serve our sovereign.**

Jesus here in the sermon on the mount preached with authority the arrival of a new reality - the Kingdom of heaven that is at hand. Into a world confused, unsure, lacking clarity on what it means to live with God. His teaching cuts like a knife through the cultural faith oriented on performance and approval of man.

Blessed he calls his followers, those approved by God. With character that rests in our need for a savior. To be formed into the seasoning of our world and the illumination of the Kingdom. With citizens who he takes higher into the absurdly beautiful life of loving our enemies.

All of it premised on there being a new King to call our own. Out of a world where religious structures and individual performance ruled to a laying down of rights and preference for others in light of who our King is.

The sermon on the mount still cuts like a knife against a gospel of self-sovereignty. A faith formed around ME and my advantage, authority, and power. All that we are invited to surrender at the feet of Jesus.

In his sermon he keeps calling us to something better and now he contrasts lives lived pursuit of self or that lived for our sovereign.

Jesus transitions to recalibrate his followers to a vertical rather than horizontal expression of faith and trust in him. In our actions, love others without fanfare. In our prayer, simple, daily requests of help are heard in secret. In our fasting (longing) in secret as the Father will reward you.

The central underlying question about these secret practices of righteousness is the question of what God we are serving. Who is watching us, which is to say, who is our judge?

How do we live toward God in the good we do?

**Matthew 5:14–16** “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (ESV)

Our good works are to be light in the world. "He wants there to be a discernible difference in the way we live as His disciples before men. People should be able to look at how we deal with conflicts, look at our sexual practices and our marriages, look at our truthfulness, look at how we respond to our enemies, and be able to say, "these people are different. It's obvious." The goal of that is not to bring praise to ourselves, but to let our light shine so that they can see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven." Leithart

Here is the contrast between living under the rule of self or our good sovereign.

## **1) Self**

The Messiah has come not to abolish the law but to fulfill it. To draw it deeper within our hearts. So the things of faith, even some of the expressions of faith

remain but Jesus awakens his followers to the right motives and goals of doing these things.

Almsgiving, prayer, and fasting were central elements in Jewish religion, and all are assumed to be valid for Jesus' disciples. The issue is not whether you should do them, but how and why.

Followers now are to beware of practicing our righteousness before other people **IN ORDER** to be seen by them. As if the goal was to be seen.

Then he goes on to describe the way of the hypocrite, the “ungodly.”

Through three ways of expression of faith or obedience we see the wrong way and then are invited into the right way. Jesus still wants his followers to do these things but with different motives.

What are the ways of the hypocrite? Essentially taking on the life of an actor. Performing religious acts for an audience of other people. With the self as the point of our behavior. When we do this there is no reward, no lasting gift with the Father, with God.

In **ACTION**, giving to those in need, the hypocrite makes a public spectacle of what they are doing so that they might be praised by others.

We get the inclination here. Of course, we want to be well-liked and thought of. We always put our best foot forward. But what Jesus is describing is selfish manipulation of things meant to honor God for personal gain.

We don't have a lot of similar almsgiving so let me illustrate what's happening.

We have all encountered the homeless, in urban centers to a great extent. A regular experience living and working in DC were panhandlers. You go about evaluating who is really in need and how that impacts your cash on hand (Jesus did just tell us to give to the one who begs from you, 5:42). But the ungodly giver in this illustration would see the chap asking for money on the street, and instead of just dropping a dollar in his bucket, you would announce at the top of your voice, **HEY EVERYONE, I JUST GAVE TO THIS GUY OUT OF THE ABUNDANCE OF MY WALLET!** Hope for applause.

Even if you don't say anything into a megaphone, you might hope someone will take notice. Maybe at least the girl you are walking with trying to impress.

That feels good, tangible respect from others. But that is as far as it goes.

Jesus has already brought up rewards - for the persecuted, whose reward is great in heaven. So we get the result of our obedience. But Jesus is saying this is self-serving, this is not obedience. This is performing. And the little praise you get from people is all the reward you will have.

Then he describes the hypocrite in **PRAYER**. When you pray don't do it like the ungodly.

They love to stand at attention among the crowds that they may be seen by others. "Oh that lady sounds holy!" "She is so faith-full." They even heap up empty phrases as the pagans.

A pagan or Gentile prayer would go on for some time because they would pray to all the gods they could think of and try to say things each would like and not be offended by. Covering their bases. So Jesus is not against long prayers (whew) but he is against those that drag on hoping to be noticed.

Using prayer to shift others' opinions or impressions of us. Growing up I was known to be naughty on occasion. And I can't remember exactly what the situation was but I knew my Dad was on his way to my room to reprimand me. So I did what any good ungodly hypocrite would do and I knelt at the end of my bed and shut my eyes tight and started praying for forgiveness, and blessing on my family. Out of the corner of my eye I saw my Dad, and as desired, my little manipulative prayer de-escalated the situation and I got away without punishment.

I had my reward.

Jesus is saying you can't manipulate God or others for gain. And the temporary being seen by others is all the reward there is. No reward at all.

To get attention the hypocrite doesn't stop with sharing a few pennies or praying for an audience. He even **fasts** for others to see so they will think better of him. Fasting is intentionally missing meals or certain things as a way of seeing how God meets that need or replaces that desire. The ungodly though do it for the likes. They take on a sad face, gloomy, disfiguring their expression to get sympathy.

'Whoa is me for not eating meat today... my iron level is so low, look at these bags under my eyes!' Choosing just the right filter on Instagram to make it clear you are suffering and captioning the pic with #fasting #so spiritual #blessed.

In the first century, fasting was a regular thing in Jewish religious expression, but over time people had taken to rubbing ashes in their hair and face to show how rough it was as if it would mean more if everyone believed you were truly going all in on a fast.

But the faux suffering was pretending in order to get praise from others and they have their reward.

All of this is for external accolades - to be seen - sick motivation for acts of obedience. Without kingdom orientation. The temporary meaningless reward that fickle people will think highly of you for ten minutes.

But performative obedience for horizontal praise - from other people - is over under King Jesus.

Jesus calls followers to live responsive faith for the glory of God not self. And this is where the real, lasting, eternal reward is.

## **2) Sovereign**

Living not for the self and praise of man but for the sovereign and his glory.

Live and obediently serve, seek, and long for God, but do it all before the One who truly sees you always.

This week we were driving and talking about the fact that the Father sees everything even in secret. And Iona said he was like the “all-seeing-eye.” Stacy corrected and said he is the “all-seeing-I-AM!”

Compared to the way of the hypocrite, lives surrendered to the King and his kingdom hit different.

I want to jump back to Jesus describing his followers as light, told to let our light shine before others.

"To attempt to live in accord with the righteousness spelled out in the preceding verses but out of motives eager for men's applause is to prostitute that righteousness. For this there will be no reward (see on 5:12) from the heavenly Father. There is no contradiction with 5:14–16, where disciples are told to let their light shine before men so that they may see their good deeds; there the motive is for men to praise the heavenly Father. Righteous conduct under kingdom norms must be visible so that God may be glorified. Yet it must never be visible in order to win man's acclaim. Better by far to hide any righteous deed that may lead to ostentation. To trade the goal of pleasing the Father for the trivial and idolatrous goal of pleasing man will never do." Carson

Jesus instructs his disciples to behave differently. Even when we are doing the same thing as the hypocrites, we are to do it with different motives. Simple, quiet faithfulness over performance. With the accent on secrecy.

In our **ACTION**, generosity without knowledge. Instead of making a production of it, give to the needy, be generous but don't even think about it, don't let the right hand know what the left has done. Simple care for others in secret. Faithful giving of ourselves and our treasure for the good of others and the glory of God, that they would worship him.

And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. You are seen by God and he rewards. Made generous by having been on the receiving end of God's generosity, it becomes second nature and it stokes the worship of our King.

In **PRAYER**, Jesus doesn't tell us what to pray but how to pray - a model of simple prayer that instead of shouting on the street corner or the crowded church

we go into our room and pray to the Father who sees in secret and will reward you.

It is an act of worship. In public worship, we are not gathered here to impress one another. We are here, "in secret," to stand together before our Father.

We pray for his glory.

"We are to pray for the coming of the kingdom. This is partly a request that the kingdom and its blessings would be ours. We are praying that the Father would realize the Beatitudes in us. We pray for the advance of God's saving, redemptive, restoring righteousness. We pray that the Father would take His throne and would set things in order. We pray that the kingdom would come, as Jesus says in the next part of the prayer, by causing His will to be done on earth as in heaven. We're praying for the restoration of the original created harmony between heaven and earth. And we're praying that we would be part of that restoration, so that as we hear and do what Jesus says, our lives will be set on a rock rather than on sand and that we will bring heaven to earth." Leithart

We ask for daily bread so that we can carry out our vocation to do good works that bring glory to our Father. And we ask for protection from temptation and evil. That we would not be led astray.

Living with forgiveness as a response to the forgiveness we have received in Jesus. The outward expression of the inward transformation the Spirit works in us.

In our **LONGING**, wanting more of Jesus, answers, in our waiting and fasting, he says stay bright. Anoint your head with oil, wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret.

God sees and he responds. Our reward is with him.

We submit and live this ethic under the King because he really reigns. The Kingdom is real and at hand.

**Revelation 19:13, 16** “He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God... [16] On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.” (ESV)

**Ephesians 1:20–23** “that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, [21] far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. [22] And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” (ESV)

**Colossians 1:15–20** “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16] For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. [17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18] And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. [19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” (ESV)

This is who our self bows to. Not the praise of people. Not the advantage we can seek. But the sovereign of the universe that has made us citizens of his Kingdom by his blood and gives us a new way to live in and for him.

Self couldn't save us - Jesus did. He lived a simple, secret love in obedience to the Father, driven by a longing for us. And now he lays before us the way of simple, secret love and long for him and others that they will know him.

The reward is better! It is him forever. Others will look at us, as lights, and see our joy in our King, and praise the Father who is in heaven.

This is the choice we get to make each day. Whom will we serve. The self, position, pretending for praise that is merely temporary. Or recognizing whose we are, knowing he is good, and walking in simple, secret ways for his glory.

**Followers of Jesus reject self to serve our sovereign.**



**Submit** - Come to Jesus. Where the self is a strange taskmaster that is never satisfied, Jesus promises peace and contentment in him.

**Matthew 11:28–30** “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] 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.” (ESV)

He will give you rest from the performing. He will give you strength to live.

**Simple Lives in Secret** - Walk with him, respond to his grace. Giving, seeking, wanting more of him. Keep coming back to it, his way is better.

Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

We are in process... you are not yet who you are becoming. “Our fulfillment lies in the death of our own agendas of fulfillment. It also lies in the crucifixion of all our ego-centered ways of living apart from complete surrender to God. It does not lie, then, in any of the places we would expect to find it. Christ’s way always turns our ways upside down. But it is only in the upside-down world of Christ’s kingdom that we will ever find the self we were called from eternity to be and the God we were created to serve. In God alone is the truth of our being.” David Benner

We once were these hypocrites, but when we were at our worst, when we tried to take over center stage, Jesus gave himself for us. Now the stage has changed because the kingdom is at hand and it is yours, rejoice!