

## **What Motivates You?**

### **Matthew 6:1-18**

We are studying the Sermon on the Mount, looking for a deeper understanding of how to live as followers of Christ and learning from Jesus himself. His sermon would have been very eye-opening in a lot of ways because of what was happening at that time under the leadership of the scribes and Pharisees.

In the past few weeks we've seen several examples of the empty righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees – how they were doing righteous deeds on the outside but full of sin within. We saw how they were obeying certain rules and laws but doing so in a way that allowed for all kinds of other sinful behaviors. They wouldn't commit murder but would harbor anger and hatred. They wouldn't commit adultery, but would look at women with lustful intent. They would give their wives the necessary certificate of divorce, but they would sin in the way they were treating them. They would swear their required oaths but not keep their word in other matters. They would think they were following the law in how they treated their enemies but they were actually twisting it to fit their sinful desires.

So they thought they were righteous and had an appearance of righteousness on the outside, but were full of sin within and Jesus was telling the people to not be like them. He was calling them to be different – their righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees or they would certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. He showed them how it must permeate their whole being so they wouldn't be like everyone else but be salt and light to the sinful world around them.

Now, as we get into chapter 6, the theme is similar – Jesus is still confronting the false righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees and teaching his people the way of true righteousness, but he shifts his focus to looking at what motivates us to do the righteous things we do. What was motivating the scribes and Pharisees? We'll see some of that in this chapter, and we'll see that it was corrupted by sin. And Jesus is going to call his followers to not be like them but to be motivated in a righteous way. He's going to use three examples to teach us, but I believe this extends to everything that we do in

life. Why do we do what we do? Who are we living for? What are we living for? What motivates us to do what we do?

This is vitally important for us because it gets to the heart, which is the source and wellspring of our lives. Everything that we think, say, and do comes from our hearts. So as important as our words, actions and thoughts may be, what's most important is the heart. If our heart is right, it will have a righteous influence on everything we do. But if our heart is wrong it will lead us astray.

So what's going on in your heart? What motivates you? This can be really hard for us to see because it's at the core of who we are. We have a really hard time seeing outside our own perspective and oftentimes it takes an outside source or measurement for us to compare ourselves to in order to see what we're actually like.

Today we're going to look again at the examples of the scribes and Pharisees who are referred to as "hypocrites" in these verses. It may be that by looking at their example you're going to see that you have the same sin problem in your life that you need to repent of and seek God's transformation. Let's start with Matthew 6:1, and we'll see which area of motivation Jesus is addressing.

Read Matthew 6:1.

*Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*

So Jesus is addressing the area of being motivated by people. All of us are motivated by people to some degree – we care about how people are doing and what they think – and there's nothing wrong with that when it's in its proper place. But it can easily become too much. As I look back at how I've lived my life, there's a period of several years in high school and college where my desire to please people was probably the strongest motivator in my life.

That motivation wasn't bad in itself, but sin brought corruption and I ended up living my life "in order to be seen by other people" which is exactly what Jesus points out as the problem of the scribes and Pharisees in verse 1. I didn't know I had that problem until I was about 22 years old when God graciously

brought an outside source of measurement into my life to compare myself to and all of a sudden I was confronted with a deep-rooted, highly controlling sin issue that I had never seen before. I wasn't living for my heavenly Father, I was living for the praise and applause of man and it became a powerful idol. It affected almost everything I did. I was highly motivated, a hard worker, trying to be the best at everything I did, and it was all because I wanted to be admired by other people.

So caring about other people and what they think isn't sin in itself, but when sin gets in there and brings corruption, it can turn that desire into an idol that controls you. That's what was happening to the scribes and Pharisees; Jesus is confronting them, and God is graciously bringing this passage before us today as an outside source of measurement for us to compare ourselves to, to see if we've unknowingly become like them.

Jesus gives three examples of how they were sinning and what his followers needed to do to avoid that sin and live in righteousness.

Read Matthew 6:2-4.

*<sup>2</sup>“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup>But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup>so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

So the example is giving to the needy. The scribes and Pharisees were doing it in a way that would draw attention and be noticed. They wanted people to be impressed by their generosity. And Jesus says, “Don't do it. You might impress other people, but you're not going to impress God. He is not going to reward you for giving those gifts because you're doing it in worship of the idol of man's praise.” That's a sinful corruption of a good motivation. Caring about other people and what they think is good. Living your life for the praise and admiration of other people is evil.

So Jesus says, in order to avoid that sin when you want to help people, do it in a way where you don't even get noticed. Rather than doing it for the praise of

man, do it for the praise of your heavenly Father. He'll see you and you will be rewarded for the good you've done.

Jesus shows us that there must be a primary motivation that comes first in all of our lives before any other motivation, and that is to do all things for the joy of glorifying God and pleasing him. That's a far greater reward than the praise of man. Do all things as unto him. Live your life as an expression of joyful worship to him. And when you do that, your desire for helping people and what they think will be in its rightful place and it won't be an idol.

When we first moved into our house we had an elderly neighbor who lived behind us and it was winter time and we just had a big snowfall and after clearing out our driveway I drove by and could see her driveway was still full of snow. So I felt compelled to help – but what was my motivation? I went back home and got a shovel and maybe a snow blower I can't remember. But I went over to her house and cleared her driveway.

As I was doing it, I remember I couldn't help but wonder if she was looking out her window and could see that it was me. I was motivated by the desire to be seen by her. And if I remember correctly, I started feeling conviction at the same time and realized there was something wrong with my motivation. I was doing a good thing, but I was doing it for the wrong reason. And I believe the Holy Spirit was bringing that conviction. So I went from wondering if she would see me, to wanting to get done and get out of there as fast as I could so she wouldn't see me. It's good to do the right thing, but God wants us to go deeper and do it for the right reason – for his glory, not our own.

The next example has to do with prayer. Read Matthew 6:5-6.

*“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup> But when 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.*

It's exactly the same idea that he said before. Why are you praying? What's your motivation? The scribes and Pharisees were doing it to be seen and praised by others. And again, Jesus says “If you do that, that's all the reward

you're going to get." Your heavenly Father is not impressed when you pray in public in order to be admired by others.

So to avoid that he tells them to pray in secret – just them and their heavenly Father. The real reward in prayer is when you do it for the joy of glorifying God and pleasing him. Now, he's not condemning public prayer or praying out loud at a prayer gathering; he's confronting a sinful motivation. You can pray in front of people, but you need to examine your heart and motives for doing so.

And I think this can go in two ways. One sinful response is to be like the Pharisees and pray to try to impress people. And you're probably the only one who can rightly discern if that's what you're doing. But the other sinful response is to care so much about what people think that you actually avoid praying with other people altogether. Corporate prayer gatherings can be uncomfortable because there's usually a few people who are very good at praying.

It can be intimidating because no one wants to sound immature or timid or uneducated and be embarrassed. And we can avoid praying with other people. But I want to encourage you. I think Jesus would tell you, it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks. Don't let your fear of others keep you away from praying with other people. Pray like nobody else is there. I love hearing unpolished prayers that come from people's hearts. They are so encouraging to me. So keep an eye on what's motivating you in prayer.

Now, Jesus goes on to give further teaching and instruction on prayer and that includes the Lord's prayer but we're not going to look at that this morning. Instead I want us to look at the last example of the sinful motivation of the scribes and Pharisees.

Read Matthew 6:16-18.

*<sup>16</sup> "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

Again we have the same thing, this time with fasting. The scribes and Pharisees were fasting in such a way that people would notice and admire them, but Jesus says, don't be like them. Look normal so no one knows. It's not like you have to keep it top secret. It's fine if someone knows you're fasting. But what's not fine is if you're letting people know because you want them to see how religious or spiritual you are. Fasting, like all things, is to be done for the joy of glorifying God and pleasing him. It's about abiding more deeply in God, not impressing other people.

So Jesus gave 3 examples for us to consider, but this teaching applies to anything you're doing in life. It can apply to any act of Christian ministry or worship: not just giving, praying, and fasting, but preaching, teaching, singing on the worship team, serving in youth or children's ministry, serving as an elder, cleaning the church when it's your week, raising your hands while we sing, anything. Why do you do what you do?

But it can also apply to everything else we do in our lives: being a good mom or dad – why are you doing it? Shoveling your neighbor's driveway, playing football or basketball, or some other sport. Doing whatever you do at work – are you working for the praise of man or of God? Posting things on social media – are you trying to get attention to impress people with your knowledge, accomplishments, or spirituality? Are you trying to stir things up because it feels good to be noticed? How many times do you check to see how many “likes” you have? Whatever you do, if you're doing it for the praise and attention of man, that's all the reward you're going to get, and God will not be impressed.

God cares deeply about what motivates you and why you do what you do. It's good to do good things, but if you're doing them for the wrong reasons, they're like vanishing smoke. Our primary motivation needs to be the joy of glorifying God and living in a way that is pleasing to him. When we start there, everything else falls in its proper place. Rather than using people to try to fill the void in your life, you will actually be able to love them and be the salt and light Christ calls us to be.