

UNREWARDED PERFECTION

Matthew 6:1

I. INTRODUCTION

II. THE TEXT

KJV—Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven..

NIV—Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven..

NASB— Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

The Message— Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won't be applauding..

III. BACKGROUND

A. CONTEXT

1. LAST VERSE OF CHAPTER 5 SETS THE WHOLE CONTEXT

5:48— *Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

a. Context for previous themes

1. For “righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees”—**5:20**
2. Jesus has given a fuller and **perfect** interpretation of the law
3. Six themes:
 - Reconciliation
 - Faithfulness
 - Respect
 - Truth/honesty
 - Generosity—overcoming evil with good
 - Perfect love

b. Context for future themes

1. Previous themes dealt with two aspects:
 - a. Relationship to neighbor—human to human
 - b. Individual *attitudes* about righteousness—in relation to the *Law*

2. Next three themes—**Chapter 6**—deal with different dimension:
 - a. Relationship with God
 - b. Religious duties—*acts* of perfection that fulfill righteousness
3. Jesus describes how to be perfectly righteous—more than scribes/Pharisees—regarding
 - Almsgiving
 - Prayer
 - Fasting

B. COMMON AND OTHER TRADITIONS

1. Common duties in three Abrahamic traditions
 - Almsgiving
 - Prayer
 - Fasting
2. Specific requirements to help the poor
 - a. Jewish
 - **Tzedakah** = charity
 - Continuation of biblical poor tithe—10%—plus allowance of poor to glean fields
 - b. Islamic
 - **Sadaqah**—voluntary giving to poor
 - **Zakat**—required giving
 1. 3rd pillar of Islam—regulated by Islamic law
 2. Give 2.5% of savings—to poor
 3. Give 5-10% of harvest—to poor
 - c. Buddhism—**dana**
 - Giving alms to monks/nuns—to connect with spiritual realm
 - d. Hinduism—**bhiksha**
 - Alms given to religious person—in turn for a religious service

IV. EXPLANATION

A. PIVOTAL ROLE OF THIS VERSE—6:1

1. This verse might apply specifically to first situation—almsgiving
2. But it introduces a principle that runs through all three following situations—**verses 1-16**
3. Notice difference in wording—equally divided variant readings:
 - a. KJV has **ἐλεημοσύνη** = mercy, almsgiving
 - Initiates the specific theme of **verses 2-4**
 - b. NIV and NASB have **δικαιοσύνη** = righteousness
 - Addresses overall theme of **verses 2-18**
 - Connects **5:20** [“your righteousness”]—with following righteous acts
4. “Beware”
 - a. Also translated—“Take care”—or—“Take heed”—or—“Be careful”
 - b. Meaning: turn your mind to—give careful attention to—concentrate on
 - c. Radical change to a new topic
 - d. What I am about to say is of special importance—what God expects of you

B. GOD’S EXPECTATION

1. General expectations
 - a. There *are* certain (religious) duties that God *does* expect us to fulfill
 - b. For example—Old Testament expectation of attitudes—**Micah 6**
 - Love mercy—be compassionate
 - Do justice—be righteous
 - Walk humbly before God
 - c. **Verses 1-18**—describe three basic obligations—specific actions—that please God
 - Take care of others—for whom God cares
 - Talk with God—and tell him your needs
 - Deny self—sincerely seek His will—by fasting [and possibly repentance implied]
2. Specific expectation

- a. **Verse 1**—might focus on specific expectations of **verses 2-4**
- b. God expects us to take care of others
- c. Related to previous text—**5:45**
 - Based on His Fatherhood of us all
 - And His fairness to all persons—sending the sun and the rain
- d. Also related to God’s special interest—in taking care of the poor

- 1. Mary’s Magnificat—quoting **Job 5** and **Psalm 107**

Lk 1: 46, 52-53— My soul magnifies the Lord. . . .He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away

- 2. Jesus’ commission—proclaimed in Nazareth—from **Isaiah 61**

Lk 4:18-19—The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

- e. Modern application

- **ἐλεημοσύνη** = [from ‘mercy’]—pity—charitable giving—benefaction
- Root for ‘eleemosynary’—charitable, non-profit causes

C. MOTIVES FOR ACTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

- 1. TRUE MOTIVES—are genuine ones that please God

- a. Again—use **Micah 6**—as a yardstick

- Mercy
- Righteousness
- Humility

- b. How these apply to almsgiving

- 1. Mercy—shows compassion to the poor—by giving for their needs
- 2. Righteousness—rightly related to God—we care for the poor as He does
- 3. Humility—we don’t seek notoriety for doing good

- 2. FALSE MOTIVES—seek to gratify self by pleasing men

- a. It is *not* wrong to *be seen* by men when we are doing good
 - 5:16**—they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father who is in heaven
- b. But it *is* wrong to do them for the *purpose of being noticed*
 - Here**—Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them
 - Mt 23:5**—Jesus said scribes and Pharisees “do all their deeds to be noticed by men”
- c. Defeats the purposes of **Micah 6**
 - 1. Not from **compassion**
 - a. But for **reputation**
 - b. Note—this actually abuses the poor—takes advantage of their situation for self-gain
 - 2. Not from **righteousness**
 - a. But from **selfishness**
 - b. Note—this actually tries to deceive God—pretended holiness and piety
 - 3. Not from **humility**—but out of **pride** and arrogance

D. REWARDS

- 1. There *are* rewards!
 - a. Mentioned 6 times in the following passage
 - b. Mentioned elsewhere in this sermon
 - 1. Previously—“**Great is your reward in heaven**”—when you have been persecuted—**5:11**
 - 2. Previously—“**What reward will you get**”—if you love only those who love you—**5:46**
 - 3. Later—in this chapter
 - 6:19-21**—store up for yourselves treasures in heaven
- c. Promised in many NT passages—most extensive description below:

I Cor 3—8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own **reward** according to his own labor. . . . **12** Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, **13** each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. **14** If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a **reward**. **15** If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

2. Nature of Rewards

a. **μισθος** = due payment for labor rendered

b. Types of Rewards—good or bad

➤ They can be of two types: good (reward)—or bad (punishment)

Rev 22:12—*Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.*

➤ Bad rewards—result in punishment

Mk 12—*such men* [teachers of the law] *will be punished most severely!*

c. Timing of positive rewards—now or later

➤ Earthly rewards come now—and only from men

➤ Eternal rewards

1. Come later

2. Come from God

3. No mention here of setting—but later—in verse 4—*hints* that it *might* be ‘openly’

E. CONCLUSION

1. God expects us to *do* things to fulfill His righteousness

2. Being (becoming) perfect as our Father—requires us to do things consistent with His nature

3. But it is not just the action that counts

4. Our motives must be pure

➤ To please Him—and not men

➤ To help others—and not use them

➤ To do them *not* for the reward—but for His sake

➤ To do them secretly—and receive a quiet ‘well done’ from the Father