

Counterfeit Christianity - Giving

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[0 : 00] Well, if you would turn with me this evening to the Gospel of Matthew in Chapter 6. I just hope the lights stay on, so you can see.

Matthew Chapter 6, and if we just read the first four verses. Take heed that you do not do your alms before men, to be seen of them.

Otherwise you have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men.

Assuredly I say unto you, they have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth, that thine alms may be in secret.

And thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. I'd like us to resume our study of this well-known passage of Scripture this evening.

[1 : 14] We had taken a break over the summer, but now I'd like us to continue to look at what could easily be described as the best sermon ever preached.

Because the Sermon on the Mount was a sermon which was delivered by Jesus to many of the multitudes who were following him. And as we've said before, maybe you have to try and cast your mind right back, but as we said before, the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount was to teach those who have entered into the kingdom of heaven through faith and repentance.

It's to teach us how to live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. And that we are to live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven by emulating and mirroring our lives on the king of the kingdom of heaven.

And so the message of the Sermon on the Mount is that through faith and repentance we are to live as a restored, a renewed and a redeemed people.

And when we were looking at this before, we said that the theme and the thrust of this entire sermon, what Jesus is teaching us and calling us to is Christ-centred living for Christ-centred lives.

[2 : 36] Christ-centred living for Christ-centred lives. And as we know and as we can see in the Sermon on the Mount, it spans over three chapters in Matthew's Gospel, Matthew 5 to Matthew 7.

And in our study of the Sermon on the Mount so far, we've only covered the contents of Matthew 5. When we began our study of this challenging sermon and we saw that Jesus opens with beatitudes. He gives nine beatitudes that reveal the marks of Christian character and conduct, which ought to be present in the lives of those who are part of the kingdom of heaven.

And then Jesus went on to illustrate to us as to these marks of Christian character and conduct and what they look like in our lives. And he did that by using the familiar illustration, which we're all well aware of, the illustrations of salt, where he says, you are the salt of the earth and then light, you are the light of the world.

But in the second half of chapter 5, Jesus went on to draw attention to a relationship to the law and the relevance of the law in our lives. He says that I didn't come to destroy the law or the prophets.

[3 : 56] I didn't come to destroy it, but to fulfill it. And Jesus said that this was because the scribes and the Pharisees, they were destroying the law.

He said that they were distorting it, they were twisting it, they were making it to suit their own ends. And so Jesus began to teach about key issues in the Christian life, such as anger and lust and divorce and loving our enemies.

And Jesus taught these issues in contrast to what the scribes and the Pharisees were teaching.

And he did so by using a repetitive phrase in order to emphasize the true teaching of Scripture.

He kept saying, You have heard that it was said, but I say to you. You have heard that it was said from the scribes and the Pharisees, but I say to you. And he kept teaching what the Scripture says

and what the Scripture emphasizes.

And through that medium of contrast, Jesus taught how we are to live in accordance with the teaching of Scripture. But now as we move into chapter 6 of Matthew's Gospel, we enter into this new section of teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

[5 : 12] And in verses 1 to 18, we can see that Jesus now challenges the practical living of the Pharisees. At the end of chapter 5, Jesus challenged the theology and the doctrine of the Pharisees.

But now Jesus calls into question the practical application of their theology. He challenges the ethics of the Pharisees. And he presents to us true Christian ethics, true Christian principles by which we ought to live by.

But just like the teaching on our relationship to the Old Testament, where there was the method of contrast, and here Jesus uses repetitive structure, along with repeated phrases, in order to emphasize the importance of his teaching.

And when you read his sermon closely and study it, just like we're doing, you become more and more aware of the fact that Jesus was a master craftsman when it came to preparing and delivering sermons.

Because his structure and his method of repetitive phrases, it really seeks to drive home the point that he's trying to make. And what I want us to see is that in this section from verses 1 to 18, Jesus is challenging the scribes and the Pharisees on the problem of counterfeit Christianity.

[6 : 46] Counterfeit Christianity. And Jesus challenges their counterfeit Christianity in relation to giving, and in relation to praying, and then in relation to fasting.

But these three acts of giving and praying and fasting, they all come under the banner of righteousness, or righteous living.

And so what we will see as we consider each of these aspects of giving and praying and fasting, is that Jesus is teaching on counterfeit Christianity.

It can be placed under two headings. You could set the two headings in which there's this contrast. The contrast between man's reward and God's remedy.

Man's reward and God's remedy. That's the contrast Jesus makes. And this evening we're looking at the first aspect of counterfeit Christianity, in which Jesus challenges the scribes and the Pharisees about giving.

[7 : 51] So in relation to giving, Jesus tells us about man's reward and God's remedy. So first of all, man's reward. Man's reward.

He says in verse 1, Take heed or beware that you do not do your alms before men to be seen of them. Otherwise you have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

Therefore when you do your alms or charitable works, do not sound a trumpet before thee as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men.

Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. And from the outset of this chapter, Jesus is calling us to beware of the trap of counterfeit Christianity.

Because when we look at these sections of teaching, when he speaks about giving and praying and fasting, Jesus teaches us to beware of religious righteousness.

[8 : 53] And as we said, Jesus uses the method of repetition, in which he repeatedly uses words and phrases in order to emphasise his point. But when Jesus is teaching against the perils of counterfeit Christianity, he says, Don't be like the hypocrite.

Don't be like the hypocrite. And that's how Jesus introduces his teaching here. He says, Don't be like the hypocrite who practices their religious righteousness before men.

Don't seek the glory of others. Don't desire the praise of people. Don't look to man for your approval. You look to your heavenly Father. And everything that Jesus is talking about here is in the act of giving and praying and fasting.

It's all before the eyes of others. So that others can see. And that others can witness how righteous and how religious we are.

But one of the words, and it's a key word in this passage, the word which Jesus repeatedly uses in his teaching, is the word hypocrite.

[10 : 07] Hypocrite. He says in verse 2, When you do your alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have the glory of men.

Assuredly, I say to you, they have the reward. Then you jump down to verse 5. When you pray, do not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.

Assuredly, I say to you, they have the reward. Then jump to verse 16. When you fast, be not as the hypocrites of a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast.

Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. And Jesus is clear. He's clear. Don't be like the hypocrites. Don't be like them.

And Jesus is describing to us, he's describing the scribes and the Pharisees. They were the hypocrites. And as you know, to call anyone a hypocrite, it's a strong indictment towards their character and their conduct.

[11:17] It's not a pleasant description. To call anyone a hypocrite, it's not a positive portrayal of someone, because, you know, hypocrite is not a very nice word.

You're calling them an actor. A hypocrite is a pretender, a fraud, a phony, a counterfeit. In fact, the word hypocrite, it comes from Greek, and it's the word from the Greek plays, which were often held in the auditoriums, in which the actor would mask their face in order to conceal their true identity and assume his role on the stage.

And with a mask over the actor's face, he would present to the audience or the crowd looking on this appearance of someone else other than his true self.

And you can often hear it being said about all the famous film stars. They're such talented actors because they can adopt their role so well.

They can become the character in the movie. They can assume the role that they've been asked to play. And what makes them such a good actor is that they can convince you into thinking that they are actually that kind of person.

[12:46] But we know that in reality, the famous film stars are nothing like the characters they play on the big screen. They're only acting. It's all role play. It's not real. It's not true.

And so what Jesus is warning us and saying to us is, don't be like the hypocrite. Don't be like the actor on the stage. Don't be like the actor and practice your religious righteousness before the audience of the world.

Don't make your Christianity a performance before others and an act to be seen by others. Because your Christianity, it's not to be a Christianity lived on the stage.

It's not to be a counterfeit Christianity. It's not to be an act of religion. And that when the stage curtain is up and the show and the role playing it, it must go on before all the audience of others where the mask is on and we're coated with all our spiritual and religious makeup in order to try and convince people how good and how holy and how faithful a Christian we really are.

And Jesus is saying to us, no. That's not what Christianity is about. That's not what it means to be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. A Christian is someone who is completely dependent upon the Lord.

[14:13] And Jesus is warning us. He's saying, if you want to do your charitable deeds and if you want to make a name for yourself and if you want to play to the crowd and if you want to be seen by others, if you value your reputation more than the relief of the poor, then you'll have your reward.

You'll get what you want. You'll have your reward. And Jesus, he puts it so bluntly. He says, if you want to sound a trumpet and make a noise in the public arena of the synagogue and the streets and draw the attention of everyone to what you are doing and what you're giving and how good and how holy and how faithful you are as a Christian, you'll have your reward.

You'll have it. That's what Jesus repeatedly says when he challenges us on these issues of giving and praying and fasting. He says in the end of verse 5, assuredly, they shall have the reward.

The end of verse 3, sorry, verse 2, assuredly, I say to you, they have the reward. Verse 5, the same, assuredly, I say unto you, they have the reward. Verse 16, assuredly, I say unto you, they have the reward.

It's repeated. You'll get your reward. If you want the praise of men, you'll get it. You'll get it. But what is our reward? What is the reward of those who act like they have a concern for the poor and yet no real concern at all?

[15:52] The real concern is to establish a reputation and gain the favour of others. What's the reward of those who act like the hypocrite? Jesus says, the glory of men.

The glory of men. That's the reward. People who engage in charitable works in order to be recognised and praised by others. Jesus says, they receive what they have desired, the glory of man.

They didn't seek the glory of God, therefore, their reward isn't the glory of God. And because they sought the glory of men, they received the glory of men. They can't expect their reward to be any greater than that.

They've been paid in full. They've received their reward. There's nothing more to come to them. Nothing more is going to be added. They've received what they sought.

They sought the glory of man. They received the glory of man. And in this, Jesus is reminding us that our chief end is not self-gratification.

[16:55] Our chief end is not to glorify man. We all know, we've all been taught from a young age that our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Because our lives and our Christianity is not to be counterfeit and played on the public stage of our church and our community. Our Christianity is to be for God's glory and the good of the kingdom of heaven.

And my friend, I keep coming back to it, but I can never get away from being reminded of the opening words of Psalm 115.

That those words are our life's song. That's our life's song in this world. That's what they ought to be. Not unto us, Lord. Not to us.

But do thou glory take. Unto thy name e'en for thy truth and for thy mercy's sake. It's not about us. It's all about God.

[18:01] It's all about his name. It's all about his glory. It's all about his kingdom. And that's why Jesus told that well-known parable of the Pharisee and the publican.

Or I suppose you could call them the counterfeit Christian and the Christian. But what I never noticed before is that Jesus highlights in that parable what the Pharisees considered to be righteousness and righteous living.

Namely, giving, praying, and fasting. Because in Luke chapter 18 where Jesus tells the parable of the Pharisee and the publican.

Luke says that Jesus spoke the parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others.

And then Jesus presented two men who went to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. And the righteous Pharisee, he stood on the stage before the audience of all those who were there in the synagogue and he said to himself, God, I thank you that I'm not like other men like the extortioners and the unjust and the adulterers or even this tax collector.

[19:24] Because I fast twice a week and I give tithes to all that I possess. And the Pharisee mentions everything to God to prove that he is righteous.

He mentions giving and praying and fasting. He mentions giving, I give tithes of all that I possess. He mentions praying, he's praying in front of everyone.

And he mentions fasting, I fast twice a week. And yet Jesus is saying, he has his reward. He has his reward. And if our hearts are like his, we will have a reward also.

We will receive the glory of man. But in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, Jesus points to the one who truly is the righteous man. Because Jesus says the publican who stood afar off, who stood afar off, right out to the sight of the crowd, away from the stage, away from performing before anyone else.

And that man, he would not so much as even raise his eyes towards heaven. And he beat his breast saying, God be merciful to me, a sinner. And that publican, because he knew his righteousness was from God and not from his own works.

[20:45] It wasn't from his giving or his praying or his fasting. He knew that his righteousness wasn't from the praise of men. Jesus says, I tell you, I tell you, this man, he went home justified.

He went home to his house righteous rather than the other man. Because the Pharisee, he had his reward.

And that's what Jesus promised. assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

It was in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, J.C. Ryle, he says about this, he says, may we all remember these things. For here lies a rock on which many are continually making

shipwreck.

They flatter themselves that all must be right with their souls if they only perform a certain amount of religious duties. Yet they forget that God does not regard the quantity but the quality of our service.

[21 : 54] His favour is not to be bought by self-righteous payment. And J.C. Ryle asks, he asks us, where are our hearts? Where are our hearts?

Are we doing all as to the Lord or as to man? Do you simply and solely desire to please him, he says, the one who sees in secret and by whom all our actions are weighed?

Are we sincere Christians or are we counterfeit Christians? These sorts of questions, says Ryle, they are the things which we should often ply our souls with.

but Jesus doesn't leave us in the dark when he comes when it comes to the way in which we should live our lives as Christians.

He presents to us the remedy to counterfeit Christianity. We've considered the structure that Jesus is using in this section of his sermon by highlighting man's reward but secondly we see that Jesus presents God's remedy.

[22 : 59] God's remedy in giving. God's remedy. He says in verse 3 But when thou doest alms let not thy left hand know what thy right hand is doing that thine alms may be in secret and thy father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

And in this section which deals with giving and also when Jesus later deals with praying and fasting Jesus sets the contrast between the follower of Jesus and the hypocrite.

And again Jesus is very direct because he says but you when you give when you pray when you fast you he's saying the follower of Jesus when you do these things you are to live in complete contrast to the hypocrite but Jesus is not only personal and direct in what he's saying when he says you Jesus is also clear he's clear that these acts of righteousness although they are condemned because of the way the Pharisees paraded themselves about he says that they must be part of our lives giving praying and fasting must be part of our Christianity these things are to be part and partial of who we are as Christians and citizens of the kingdom of heaven because

Jesus says when you do your charitable deed it's not a case of if you do it it's when you do it it's when you do it when implies to us that giving praying and fasting are part and partial of our Christian lives but in particular to the issue of giving which Jesus is addressing here the Jews they not only viewed giving as an obligation and an offering of free will if you so pleased the Jews saw giving and charity as a command in fact it was a command because in Deuteronomy 15 verse 11 the Lord commanded his people and he he said to them the poor will never cease from the land therefore I command you saying you shall open your hand wide to your brother to your poor and your needy in your land but as you would expect the Pharisees they made their giving and their charity a show it was a performance it was a ritual it was stage play but the command still stood and the

Jews took giving to the poor and charity very seriously there were many people in Israel and there were many poor people in Israel and charity was seen as important to the point that in each community there were officials who made weekly collections of goods and money just for the poor and throughout the centuries of the Christian church the church has always made an effort to help the poor and we're seeing it more and more recently even in our 21st century with all these food banks being set up throughout our country and that was even the primary role of deacons in the early church it wasn't just to stand at the door and to deal with all the fabric of the church it was to help and to visit the poor and those who had been widowed because in the early church the disciples when they were all increasing in number and the church was growing and growing to the point that they were neglecting the poor and the widows of the community it says in act 6 that they chose out seven men of good repute full of the holy spirit full of wisdom they were anointed and appointed to the office of a deacon and the office of a deacon was instituted in the early church not just to help the widows and the poor but also to allow the elders of the congregation to devote themselves to prayer and the preaching of God's word and that teaching is still relevant to us today and so when Jesus says when you give when you give he isn't teaching that we need to give more he's not saying that we need to dig deeper into our pockets and put more pennies in the plate

[27 : 43] Jesus has already assumed that because we are his disciples we are expected to give and contribute to the life and well-being of the church of Christ according to our means my friend we are to give simply because God so loved that he gave he gave to us the best gift the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ and and you know every time I think of the issue of giving and some

people have problems with giving to the church because they either think money is wasted or misspent and I don't like to say it but sometimes I agree money can be better spent on things that are more important but our duty that Jesus is pointing us to is giving and every time I think of the issue I go back to that beautiful occasion in Luke chapter 7 when Jesus was in the house of

Simon the Pharisee so we're in the house of Simon the Pharisee and this certain woman comes in probably a prostitute and she comes in carrying the alabaster box of ointment and she came in and she sat behind Jesus sat at his feet and we're told that this woman she sat at the feet of Jesus weeping she was weeping weeping she was weeping so much because of her love for the Lord and her devotion to Jesus that while she wept her tears were washing the feet of Jesus and then she started drying his feet with her hair and then we're told that this woman she loved Jesus so much that she started kissing the feet of Jesus and anointing them with this expensive ointment from the alabaster box and after speaking to Simon the Pharisee about the hardness of his heart and his lack of love towards Jesus

Jesus said you see this woman you see this woman her sins which are many they are forgiven why she loved much I just love that for she loved much she loved much she gave much because she loved much and that's what Jesus is stressing to us here that our giving is not to be a show or a performance or a ritual and that our motive for giving is not to be seen by others or praised by others for how much or how little we give the left hand is not to know what the right hand is doing it's an expression that means that our giving our offering is not to be anyone's business but between you and the Lord nobody else needs to know because it's a matter of the heart it's a matter of worship it's a matter of giving to the Lord what is due to him because we love him because we love him my friend our motive of giving should be one of worship our motive should be for God's glory because that's what it's all about our worship begins our focus in worship is all

God's glory and our worship it doesn't begin when the preacher or whoever it is says let us worship God it begins at the door putting the money in the plate when we make our offering of worship to the Lord and we do it because we love him and we want to serve him and when we put our offering in the plate or give an offering of support to the cause of Christ in any sphere throughout his church whether it's large or small we should be saying to the Lord use my offering for your glory and the extension of your kingdom use my offering for your glory and the extension of your kingdom and was that not what happened with the young boy who gave his lunch to the Lord he gave five loaves and two fish all he had but he gave it to the

Lord and it fed five thousand people and that's what we should be like with our giving it's not a show or a performance but prayerfully giving to the Lord saying use my offering for your glory your kingdom it's all about you and the promise which Jesus gives to us here is that our giving it's not in vain because your father who sees it in secret will himself reward you openly and the apostle Paul he picked up on this issue when he was speaking and writing to the church in Corinth he emphasized that our offering to the Lord is a matter of the heart he said let each one give as he purposes in his heart not grudgingly or of necessity for God loves a cheerful giver

[33 : 17] God loves a cheerful giver and in relation to what Paul said I just want to say in closing that it's not only our temporal giving that the Lord loves it's not just our offering of money which the Lord desires from us whether we think of it like that or not our giving it's a spiritual act it's a spiritual act but I say this because when we come to Romans chapter 12 everybody loves the book of Romans in the book of Romans Paul has discussed the depths of theology and he's discussed all these things with the people of Rome he's emphasized the doctrines of grace and shown their importance in our lives and he does that throughout the first 11 chapters of the letter to the Romans but in Romans chapter 12 Paul begins his exhortation to apply all that information in their practical living and he begins by saying

I appeal to you therefore brothers by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable unto God which is your spiritual worship and what Paul is saying and what we can take from the teaching of Jesus is that our offering in the plate is not only a spiritual offering which we are called to give because we are also called it's not the only offering but we are also called he says to present our bodies our lives our whole being as offerings to the Lord where our spiritual giving is not only what's in our purse or in our wallet but our time our time we are called to give our time in our serving to the Lord whether it's visiting the elderly those who are sick those who are lonely those who need encouragement we give our time to them in our offering to the

Lord maybe also our time in prayer as an offering to the Lord we're also to give of our talents not to bury them or to hide them but to use them for the glory of God whether our talent or our gifts are singing presenting or working with young people in the creche the Sunday school a youth fellowship or the parent and toddler group whether it's working with the elderly or helping and encouraging those with addictions or it's welcoming people to church encouraging people to come to church to come from the community into the church and we might not even think about it or consider it much or even think that it's any effort at all but cleaning tidying up helping out mucking in baking cooking making tea coffee serving others washing dishes after fellowship setting up for different events in the congregation my friend it's all all spiritual acts of worship to the

Lord all to the Lord and our motive in doing them this is what Jesus is getting at shouldn't be out of a sense of duty or others seeing us but out of love all out of love where we love much we give much and we serve much all because we were forgiven much we were forgiven much and that should be our motive we love him because he first loved us we serve him because he first humbled himself to death even the death of a cross we love much we give much we serve much because we love him because we have been forgiven much and you know J.C.

Ryle he summed up this teaching of Jesus in a sentence a giving saviour should have giving disciples a giving saviour should have giving disciples so may that be true of us here in Barbos as we continue to serve the Lord in this church and in this community may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray O Lord our gracious God give to us a servant attitude and the servant heart to know that thou art one who sent thy son not to be ministered to but to minister to us and O Lord we bless and praise thee that he was a servant of the highest order the highest rank and yet he became one who would wash even the feet of his disciples O Lord that we might follow in his footsteps and see that he turned to his disciples and say this is a new commandment that you love one another as I have loved you

[39 : 02] O Lord help us we pray thee to serve thee as we ought to love thee because thou art one who is so good to us and to give in any way that we can to the furtherance of thy kingdom and for the glory of thy name or to lift up the name of Christ to see him exalted for it is not unto us Lord it is not to us but do thou glory take bless us then we pray thee bless our homes and our families remember as we heard Peter and their family Lord we commit them to thee O Lord how we cannot understand these providences but we thank and praise thee that that even in these situations that we are able to cast all our cares upon thee for thou art one who cares for us undertake for us then we plead and do us good for Jesus sake Amen shall conclude by singing in psalm 96 again from the sing psalms version psalm 96 it's on page 127 singing from verse 7 down to the end of the psalm that's 96 a 96 a from verse 7 all nations to the

Lord ascribe the glory that is due glory and strength ascribe to God and praise his name anew enter his courts with joy and bring an offering with you worship the Lord in holy fear all earth before him bow down to the end of the psalm to God's praise all nations do the Lord ascribe the glory that is true glory and strength glory and praise and praise his name on you enter his courts with joy and grace and offering with youem ye how

The Lord will judge the peoples in his truth.

Let them rejoice and earth be glad, with joy let oceans ring.

The fields and all in them will shout, and forest trees will sing.

[43 : 03] They all will sing before the Lord, who comes to judge the earth.

He'll judge the world in righteousness, the peoples in his truth.

Amen. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen. Thank you.

Amen. Amen.