

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 20 August 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Motive for Kingdom Righteousness

Matthew 6:1-8

Probably most of you have heard of John Bunyan's famous book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which was published in 1678. In this allegorical story, the main character, who is named Pilgrim (or "Christian"), has left his birthplace, the City of Destruction, and has gone to the cross for salvation, and gotten onto the straight and narrow highway that leads to the Celestial City (which represents Heaven).

Now, one of the places that Christian visited along the way to the Celestial City was a castle called **Palace Beautiful**. This castle represents the local church, as a place of security, rest, and strengthening for Christians. While at Palace Beautiful, Christian had a conversation with three hostesses named **Charity, Prudence, and Piety**; and they asked him many questions about his journey. At one point, Charity asked Christian whether he still struggled with the sins that plagued him before he was saved. Christian answered, "Yes, but greatly against my will; especially my inward and carnal cogitations, with which all my countrymen, as well as myself, were delighted. But now all those things are my grief; and might I but choose mine own things, I would choose never to think of those things more; but when I would be doing of that which is best, that which is worst is with me." Prudence then asked, "Do you find sometimes as if those things were *vanquished*, which at other times are your perplexity?" Christian answered, "Yes, but it is seldom; but they are to me *golden hours* in which such things happen to me."¹

I think every Christian in this room can identify with Pilgrim! We all have had times of fellowship with the Lord that were so "golden," and so holy, that during that time, it felt as though the sin nature had been vanquished forever. However, we soon found that our old, wicked, carnal nature was still very much alive, and that we still had to do battle with it. So it was with Pilgrim. After staying for a couple days at Palace Beautiful, Pilgrim went forth from the palace clad in armour (which represents the "armour of God"); and as he walked down into a valley called Humiliation, he encountered a half man, half-reptile like creature named Apollyon (who represents the Devil). Very soon, they engaged in a fierce battle, from which Christian emerged injured, but victorious. However, before that battle, Apollyon tried to threaten, terrify, and bribe to get Christian to turn back, and not to walk in the King's Highway anymore. One of Apollyon's tactics was to remind Christian that he *still secretly desired to sin*, and that he thus had no business trying to serve the King of the Celestial City. Apollyon reminded Christian that whenever he talked with others about his Christian journey (as he had just been doing the day before), he secretly desired their praise. He reminded Christian that "When thou talkest of thy journey, and of what thou hast heard and seen, thou art inwardly desirous of vainglory in all that thou sayest and doest."²

I'm sure that none of you have desired "vainglory" since you were saved, right? Not! We *all* have been guilty of secretly seeking the praise of men. That is why the Lord Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, had to warn His followers *not* to seek the praise of others. The citizens of *His Kingdom* are to imitate the righteous character of their King; but in order to imitate Christ's righteousness, Christians must have the right *inward motivation* for everything that they do. The right motivation is to *glorify God* in everything we say, do, and think. In this morning's message, as well as in the next couple weeks, we will see how this motivation plays out in three areas of our lives—namely, in almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. The title of this message is *The Motive for Kingdom Righteousness*.

Read Matthew 6:1-8.

I. Righteous almsgiving (vv. 1-4)

At the beginning of **Matthew 6**, the emphasis of Christ's sermon suddenly shifts. Christ is now emphasising the actual *practice* of righteousness in everyday situations: and the three aspects of righteousness that He addresses are **almsgiving, prayer, and fasting**. We will examine each of these areas as we study **verses 1-18** over the next couple weeks.

Now, to the Jewish people, almsgiving, prayer, and fasting were the most righteous things that a person could do. However, if they had to pick which of these three was the most important, most of them probably would have said, "almsgiving." In fact, in the Temple, there was a collection box into which people cast their alms for the poor; and this box was called "the box of righteousness"! To the Jew, almsgiving *was* righteousness.

Now, to be sure, God *is* very pleased when we give to the poor. Those who are citizens of Christ's Kingdom *will* have a God-given compassion on the poor; and they *will* try to help those in need. In **Psalm 112:9**, God describes the righteous man as one who "***hath dispersed,***" and "***hath given to the poor***"; and "***his righteousness,***" David says, "***endureth for ever.***" **Proverbs 19:17** says, "***He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD.***" Giving to the poor is so important to God, that He considers a gift to the poor to be the same as a gift to *Him*. In fact, giving to the poor is an act of *worship*. The word "religion" (which is based on the Latin word *religio*) simply means "worship"; and God says that true religion is to help the orphans and the widows.

Read James 1:27.

It should go without saying that Jesus' followers give to the poor. That is what citizens of the Kingdom desire to do. Now, that having been said, we must never allow almsgiving to be mistaken as a *means of salvation*. Most false religions (including apostate "Christian" religions), have turned almsgiving into a good work by which a person can earn his way to Heaven. My friends, giving to the poor can in no way earn us a place in God's Kingdom. Perhaps *you* believe that you are O.K. with God, and on your way to Heaven, because you give to charity, or try to help people in need. If this be the case, you are tragically mistaken. The Bible says, "***Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.***" You must place your trust in *Christ*, and what He did for you on the cross, if you want to get into Heaven!

Now, the fact that many false religions have made almsgiving into a means of salvation, or into a "social gospel," should not cause us to have a "knee-jerk reaction," and to go in the *opposite* direction, and to *dismiss* giving to the poor as "unimportant." God is very concerned with the plight of the poor. He loves and cares for them. Christ Himself, though He owned virtually nothing in this world, gave what He had to the poor. As you read through the Gospels, you see Jesus giving to the poor regularly. Remember when Jesus and His disciples were at Simon of Bethany's house, and Judas complained that the spikenard that Mary had poured on Jesus' feet should have been sold for 300 pence, and have been given to the poor? Obviously, Judas was a

thief, who had an ulterior motive; yet, why did he feel that he had the freedom to suggest that they sell the ointment, and give that large sum to the poor? Because that is the sort of thing that the Lord would ordinarily have done! On the night of the last supper, when Judas went out to betray Jesus, the other disciples thought that Jesus had sent Judas out to give something to the poor. Why did they think this? Because they were used to seeing Jesus give to the poor!

We cannot say that we love God, yet ignore the affliction of those who are in need. The Apostle John said, ***“But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”*** Giving to those in need should be part of every Christian's life. Yet, as we give, we must take heed to Jesus' warning. Jesus warns us *not* to be like the Pharisees, who gave their alms in places of public concourse, so that others might see and admire them. They made such a big fuss of their giving, that they may as well have sounded a trumpet before them! They wanted everyone to know how generous they were. Little did they know that their righteousness was not righteousness at all!

The wrong motive for almsgiving is **boasting**; but the right motive is **sincerity**. God wants the citizens of *His* Kingdom to give out of *love* to Him, and out of love to the person who is in need; otherwise, we will receive no reward from Him. If the desire for admiration from others be mixed in, our almsgiving is not righteous at all. **Proverbs 20:6** says, ***“Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man (literally, “a man of truth”) who can find?”*** A “man of truth” is just the opposite of a “hypocrite”—an actor; and that's exactly what the Pharisees were!

Now, when you read about the extreme pride and ostentation of the Pharisees, it's easy to say, “Well, *I'm* not like them. *I* don't sound a trumpet when I give.” But *do* you? You may not make as big a fuss as the Pharisees did; but do you make seemingly random, “innocent” little comments to let people in on the fact that you have given to someone? What about when someone provokes you by falsely accusing you of not caring for the poor? Do you let pride get the best of you? You may not have *intended* to boast when you got up that morning; but all of a sudden, you want to declare *your* goodness to others. I remember one time, during street preaching, when a woman came up to me, and angrily pointed to a man who was begging beside the bank. I had given to this man a number of times already; but this woman wrongly assumed that I had *not* given to him—that I only cared about preaching at people, instead of caring for them. She pointed at the man and said, “While you're standing there preaching your propaganda, that man over there needs help. What have *you* done to help him?” Immediately, my flesh reared its head. When you pour yourself out to people in need on a regular basis, and then someone comes along and ignorantly accuses you of *not* caring for the poor, your flesh resents it; and you are tempted to respond in pride. In my flesh, I wanted to start enumerating to this woman some of the notable things that we have done to help those in need. But then, Jesus' words came back to me: ***“That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.”*** I knew that I shouldn't boast of what we have done to help the poor; but I also knew that this lady needed to understand that God's people *do* care for the poor. So, I simply said, “Yes, as Christians, we *are* aware of the needs of poor people in this town, and we *do* help them.” Of course, she sarcastically responded, “Oh, I'm sure you do,” and walked on. Obviously, she didn't believe me; but the truth had been spoken, and our Lord's name had been honoured, without glorifying myself.

The right *motivation* for almsgiving is **sincerity**; and therefore, the right *method* for our giving should be **secrecy**. Let's read **verses 3 and 4** again. (**Read verses 3 and 4.**) Jesus' command to "***Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth***" is a famous one, which has made its way into everyday speech. Yet, what, exactly, does it mean? This probably refers to the fact that in the Temple, the *corban* box (the box into which gifts for the poor were placed) was on the righthand side of the entryway; and thus, most people would have placed their gift into the box with their right hand. Jesus is saying, "Whatever your right hand does to help the poor, don't let your left hand know it." In other words, "Keep it as private as possible, so that you are not seen of men."

The very fact that Jesus had to warn His disciples not to do give their alms to be seen of men shows that we are capable of doing just that! Even Jesus' Apostles had to be warned against this—perhaps even *more so*. Remember, Jesus had given the Apostles incredible power—the power to heal diseases, cast out devils, cleanse lepers, and raise the dead! Paul called these "***the signs of an Apostle***." These were signs which set them apart even from everyone else—even from other Christians. Not every believer could do these things: and those who *did* do these things had these gifts imparted to them by the laying on of the Apostles' hands! If the Apostles weren't careful, these gifts that God had given them just might engender *pride*, mightn't they? Let's examine what Jesus said when He imparted these gifts to them.

Read Matthew 10:5-8.

Can you imagine if you had this kind of power? The Apostles did! Yet, this power was not to be used for their own benefit. Jesus said, "***Freely ye have received, freely give.***" That word "***freely***" means "as a free gift, without payment." "Payment" can be in the form of money; but it can also be in the form of *admiration*, and *praise*. The Pharisees gave to the poor; but not without strings attached. They obviously considered the admiration of others to be a "payback" worthy of the "investment" they had made! To give freely, then, means not only to give without *financial* strings attached, but to give without any expectation of praise from others. Otherwise, it is not "free" giving at all! Christian, are *you* giving freely? Do you do your alms in secret?

II. Righteous prayer (vv. 5-8)

(**Read Matthew 6:5-6 again.**) Christ has taught us about righteous almsgiving; now, He is teaching us about righteous prayer. Prayer is an extremely important part of our lives. It is our lifeline to God. Yet, once again, Jesus is warning us to be sure that we have the right *motivation* when we pray. The wrong motive for prayer is **boasting**; the right motivation is **sincerity**.

Now, let's look at an example of a *wrong* prayer. In **Luke 18**, Jesus tells a parable of two men who went to the Temple to pray—one of them a Pharisee, and the other a publican. This parable is, no doubt, based upon scenes from real life. The people would have been very familiar with the

scene that Jesus is portraying in this parable—especially the part about the Pharisee’s prayer. They had *seen* the Pharisees pray this exact kind of prayer, many times. Let’s take a look.

Read Luke 18:9-14.

The Pharisee’s prayer wasn’t a prayer at all, was it? It was a “bragimony”! He was telling God (and everyone else) about how great and righteous he was. His heart was filled with pride; and God did not hear his prayer. The tragic fact is that this Pharisee did not even *know* God, because he had never been justified by God. The *publican* went away justified, because he humbled himself, and asked for God to have mercy on him, and save him. In contrast, the Pharisee went away still *unjustified*, because he had never repented of his sin, and trusted in God’s mercy to save him. It’s no wonder, then, that his prayers were filled with self-praise, instead of godly humility. Undoubtedly, his *private* prayers (if he *did* pray in private) were also filled with self-praise.

Now, we who are saved *have* been justified before God. Yet, we are still sinners; and it is easy for us to be *like* the Pharisees. When our hearts are not in submission to God, *self* is in charge; and pride *will* manifest itself in our prayers—whether they be in private, or in public. We may not be as ostentatious and showy as the Pharisees were; but we can still, ever-so-subtly, make mention of our righteousness as we pray, for the purpose of being noticed by others.

What, then, is the antidote to this problem? First of all, we must continually humble ourselves before God in our hearts. Secondly, to *avoid* the temptation to praise ourselves, we should pray with the right *method*. The right *motive* is **sincerity**; the right *method* is **secrecy**. Jesus commands us to go into our closet (or “private room”), and to close the door, and *then* pray.

Now, please don’t misunderstand: Jesus is *not* saying that there should be no public prayers. Jesus is *not* saying that prayer is a very “private matter,” and that you should therefore keep your prayers to yourself, and never pray in front of anyone else. Jesus Himself prayed publicly on a regular basis. Just before He fed the 5,000, He prayed and gave thanks to the Father for the food. During His times with the disciples, He often stopped, looked up to Heaven, and prayed—such as at the tomb of Lazarus, when He said, ***“Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.”*** David prayed publicly, before the whole nation of Israel; and so did Solomon. The Apostles all prayed publicly. In the local church, God commands *all the men* to pray, ***“lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.”*** Jesus is *not* giving us an excuse to refrain from participating in prayer time at church. We *need* to pray publicly. We need to pray in front of our families, as well. As I was growing up, my dad did not hole up in his room when he prayed: he read his Bible, and prayed, in the sitting room, where I could see him, if I happened to be passing by. Every day, early in the morning, I saw my dad reading his Bible and praying; and it made a huge impression on me. It challenged *me* to make prayer a huge priority in my life. My children often see *me* at the tail end of my prayer time in the morning, as well, if they happen to walk into the sitting room. I don’t mind their seeing me, because I want them to realise that spending time with God is extremely important. Praying publicly, in itself, is not wrong. In

fact, it's not even wrong to make a *private* prayer to God in a place where others can see you. Daniel prayed a private prayer in a place where he could be seen; and God *rewarded* him for it!

Read Daniel 6:1-10, 25-28.

Three times per day, Daniel prayed to God with his windows open toward Jerusalem. He probably wasn't seen by very many people; but he *was* visible enough that if a passerby happened to glance toward Daniel's window, he could see him. Why was it not wrong, then, for Daniel to pray in a place where people could see him? Because he wasn't praying for the purpose of being seen and admired! He was praying in this manner because this is the way that God had *commanded* the children of Israel to pray if and when they were taken away captive to a foreign land. Every time Daniel prayed toward Jerusalem, he was acknowledging that God's dwelling place was *still* the city of Jerusalem, and that His people *would* be re-gathered to the land one day.

Read 1 Kings 8:46-50.

Daniel prayed toward Jerusalem to show his faith in God's promise that Israel would be regathered. He was also showing that no earthly power had the right to sever his relationship with God. If Daniel had suddenly retreated to the secrecy of his house, it would appear that an earthly king had the power to break of His relationship with the King of Heaven. God saw Daniel's heart; and he knew that Daniel was not praying in this way to exalt himself before others. So it should be in *our* lives, as well. Generally, we should pray in secret; but whether we pray in private, or in public, our prayer should be made sincerely, with no thought of bringing praise to ourselves.

We've seen that **secrecy** is the right method of prayer. However, there is another right method for prayer: and that is **simplicity**, instead of babbling. **(Read Matthew 6:7-8.)** What does Jesus mean when He warns us against "*vain repetitions*"? Well, first of all, we need to understand what Jesus does *not* mean. He is *not* talking about "asking for the same thing repeatedly." Christ *invites* us (nay, *commands* us) to be fervent in our prayers, and not to be afraid to ask again and again. **George Müller** prayed for **50 years** that two of his unsaved friends would be saved, even though it seemed it would never happen. Some of his friends thought that he was wasting his time; but Müller didn't. As it turned out, both these men *did* get saved—one shortly before, and the other shortly after, Müller's death! Asking for the same thing again and again is *not* vain, or worthless! Jesus Himself prayed the same things repeatedly—such as when He prayed, three times, for this "*cup to pass from me.*" God *wants* us to be consistent and fervent in our prayers!

Read Luke 18:1-8.

What, then, *does* it mean to make "*vain repetitions*"? Christ is talking about praying rote, memorised prayers, over and over again. He's talking about *chants*, and *mantras*, such as the kind of prayers that the heathen pray. Heathens pray to their gods in this way because they believe that

by chanting certain “holy words” over and over again, many times, their god will somehow be impressed. A good example is the way the priests of Baal prayed on Mount Carmel. From morning to evening they chanted “*O Baal, hear us,*” as they cut themselves, and danced around the altar (no doubt, to the beat of drums). In stark contrast, Elijah got up, in simple faith, and prayed a few, concise words to the *true* God; and immediately, fire came down upon the altar!

It's the same way today. Many people in professing Christian religions are taught to pray vain repetitions. Catholics are taught that by mumbling the Ave Maria, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, and other mantras, they will earn favour with God. Many Protestants do the same kind of prayers, as well. The priest says something like “O God the Father of heaven, have mercy upon us miserable sinners”; and then the people repeat what he just said. The priest then says, “O God the Son, Redeemer of the world: have mercy upon us miserable sinners”; and the people repeat what he said. From there, it goes on and on. Protestants, too, often repeat the Lord's Prayer corporately every Sunday, as though by repeating these words, there were some kind of benefit. Brethren, that is *not* the way Jesus intended us to use that wonderful prayer! As we will see next week, the Lord's Prayer is simply a model prayer, to show us the basic things that we should include in our prayers. *Real* prayer is simple *communication with God*, and not mindless chanting.

Now, many believers, though they may not pray a rote, memorised prayer over and over, still manage to come up with their own “vain repetitions.” They come up with their own rote prayers, which they say nearly word-for-word, every single time. Their prayers are vague, non-descript, barren, and dry—a mere collection of flowery-sounding “verbal clutter.” “Lord, bless this day, and bless us all. Bless all the missionaries everywhere, and bless all the sick, and give us a good day in the Lord today,” and so on. There is nothing technically “wrong” with any one statement in this prayer; but there is *no faith* in it. There is no passionate pleading with God. No specific needs are mentioned for themselves, or for any specific missionaries, or for any specific sick or suffering people, because the person praying does not have the faith to ask for these things. It is just a “fluff,” empty prayer, prayed merely for the sake of praying, because “It's church time, and praying is what we are supposed to do.” These are what Jesus called *battologia*—“*vain words.*”

Now, Jesus also warned against *polylogia*, which literally means “*many words,*” or “*much speaking.*” (Read verse 7 again.) In **Matthew 23:14**, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, because they “*for a pretence make long prayer.*” Now, there is nothing wrong with a long prayer. We have many needs to pour out to God; and God *wants* us to spend much time talking with Him, both corporately and privately. Christ Himself often got alone with God the Father and prayed to Him *all night!* However, praying a long prayer *for the intention of impressing others* is abominable to God. Also, *saying* a long prayer, instead of actually *praying*, is pointless. God commands us to “**Take with you words, and turn to the LORD.**” God commands us to consider and choose our words well, and to make sure that they come from a *heart* that is truly repentant and worshipful.

Now, let's read **verse 7** again. (Read verse 7.) Many people wonder, “If God already know what we need before we ask Him, why do we need to pray at all?” There are two answers to this question. **First, God wants us to depend on Him!** He doesn't need us to pray a long prayer, just

to get the point across, because He *already* knows our needs. He simply wants us to rely on Him, and talk to Him about it. Secondly, God wants us to pray because He has chosen to use us as vessels to accomplish His will. He *could* do it all on His own; yet, in His love, He allows us to be “co-labourers” with Him. An earthly father doesn’t *need* his toddler’s help to build the tree house; but lets him help, anyway. So it is with God. God puts in the hearts of His people the desire to pray for their own needs, and for the needs of others; and in His mercy, He answers their prayers.

As Christians, we need to grow in Christ daily: and this includes in our *prayer lives!* God wants us to learn to pray to Him as a friend to a friend. He wants us to pray easily, naturally, and without pomp or fluff. He wants us to pray with the love, faith, and unpretentiousness of a child, and with the confidence that *He will* answer us according to His will. Yet, sadly, many Christians are like babies who have never grown up. Spiritually speaking, they are like Brooke Greenberg, who died at the age of 20, in Baltimore. Because of a rare anti-aging disease called Syndrome X, she was only 30 inches tall, 7.25 pounds, and with the mind of a one-year-old, at the time of her death. Brooke couldn’t help her condition; yet, many Christians, who *could* grow up spiritually (if they would just submit themselves to God, and feast on His Word), remain in spiritual infancy, despite being saved for many years. As Dr. David Cloud puts it, “Their Christian lives remain self-centered. They require a lot of attention, but they don’t contribute to the family business. They throw spiritual temper tantrums when things don’t go as they like.”³ They have never really learned how to talk to God. Christian, let this not be true of you! Pray righteous prayers!

III. The reward of righteous almsgiving and prayer (vv. 4, 6, 7-8)

(Read verses 4, 6, 7, and 8 again.) Twice in these verses, Jesus promised “*reward*” to Kingdom citizens who give alms in secret, and who pray in secret. The principle is simple: if you do charitable deeds for the praise of men, then the praise of men is precisely what you will get—but nothing more. To gain reward from men is to *lose* reward from God. However, if you give and pray in secret, for no other reason than that you love God, God will reward you.

By the way, you’ll notice that Jesus calls it a “*reward*.” A “reward” is not something that is given out of *debt*; it is something that is given out of *grace* and *kindness*. In His *grace*, God chooses to reward us when we give righteously, and pray righteously. God is *not* our “debtor”! He doesn’t owe it to us. Rather, He rewards us out of His love and mercy.

How, then, does He reward us? Well, sometimes God rewards us with plenty of food and material goods, to meet our earthly needs. For example, in **Proverbs 19:17**, God says that when a man gives to the poor, “*that which he hath given will he (the LORD) pay him again.*” Sometimes God rewards us with deliverance in times of distress. **Psalm 41:1** says, “*Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble.*” God also rewards us with honour and a good name (which, by the way, brings honour to *His* name). **Psalm 112:9** says that when a man gives to the poor, “*his horn shall be exalted with honour.*” God can reward us however He wishes in this life! However, one thing is certain—at the resurrection of the just, *all*

will be known. The powerful prayers that were made by God’s servants in secret closets will be acknowledged; and the answers that God gave to those prayers will be made known to all.

Read 1 Timothy 5:24-25.

Conclusion: Whether on this earth, or in eternity, every evil work, and every *good* work, will be made known. God will bring forth believers’ righteousness as the light, and their judgment as the noonday. **William Carey** laboured as a pastor and missionary for a total of **52 years**, both in England and in India; yet, all that time, his invalid sister **Polly** (who could do little more than eat, pray, and write) was praying for his work from her sickbed in England, and was sending him encouraging letters. She was the “unsung hero” behind his work for the Lord! One day, at the resurrection of the just, both Carey, and his sister Polly, will receive their reward. Folks, it is *my* sincere prayer that every one of us here will be able to join Carey and his sister in receiving great reward because we, too, gave and prayed secretly, and faithfully! Christian, if your giving and your prayer life need help, I urge you to talk with God about it right now! Ask the Lord to teach you to pray! **I would also challenge those who might not be saved.** Perhaps you have an outward “righteousness”; but have never trusted in Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, to save you from your sins. If so, please let go of your pride, and place your faith in Jesus Christ today!

¹ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), pp. 43-44.

² *Ibid.*

³ Dr. David Cloud, “THE BABY WHO DIDN’T GROW UP,” Friday Church News Notes, August 18, 2023, www.wayoflife.org
fbns@wayoflife.org.