

Counter Culture
"Giving And Fasting - Not Hypocritical, But Real"
Matthew 6:1-4, 16-18

To this point, Jesus has been challenging us with moral righteousness (e.g. avoiding lust, anger, revenge, doing good to those who do evil to us). But now, Jesus challenges us to have a deeper righteousness in our personal devotion to God.

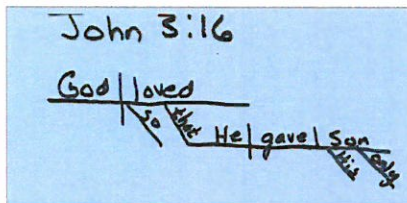
Matthew 6:1-4, 16-18 - "Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. When you give to someone in need, don't do as the hypocrites do - blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. But when you give to someone in need, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you . . . And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you."

As humans, we love to be noticed, recognized, honored. It's part of why we do so many things - to be noticed, to get a laugh, to get attention, to be honored or complimented.

I. Giving. Vs. 1-4

A. Notice, that Jesus says, "when you give" ... not "if you give." Jesus assumed that those who loved and followed Him would be generous towards others.

Look closer at this verse so many have memorized.



What He gave shows how much he loves us. He demonstrated His love by giving. Let's go back to Romans 5:8, which we saw last week.

Romans 5:8-10 - "But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son."

It has been said, "we are never more godlike than when we give."

B. Beware of doing it to be seen.

1. By others (vs. 2)

(The Rich Family in our Church, by Eddie (Smith) Ogan, a true story from a woman named Eddie - told in 1990 as a letter to missionaries to make them laugh, but she didn't know how it would touch millions as it went as viral as something could go in 1990.)

2. By yourself (vs. 3). Why beware of these?

- So you don't become hypocritical.

- So you don't lose your reward in heaven.

II. Fasting. Vs. 16-18

A. Why fast? What are the spiritual benefits?

1. The Bible speaks of many people who fasted. Moses, David, Elijah, Esther, Daniel and Jesus are people the Bible tells us fasted because of their devotion to God.

2. People in the Bible fasted when they wanted to focus on God and their dependance on Him and even on a special mission they wanted to accomplish for God.

3. Fasting reveals the things that tend to control us...human cravings and desires. By fasting, we are showing mastery over our bodies. (1 Corinthians 9:27)

4. It helps us to focus on a more important need at hand.

B. Whatever the reason, it should be spiritual, not selfish but selfless. So Jesus says in Matthew 6:16 to beware of how and why we do it.

1. Do not make yourself obviously look or sound as if you are fasting. Keep your fasting a secret from other people.

2. Don't fast for political or selfish reasons. The idea of a hunger strike is foreign to Scripture.

Again, the reasons to be careful how and why we fast.

- So we avoid hypocrisy.

- So we don't miss out on the reward that comes from true fasting - being noticed by God.

Conclusion: The main point is this: God wants us to display our devotion to Him, by giving to Him and to people He created and loves so much.