

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

SERMON: Matthew 6:1-6**FOR WHOM IS THE SHOW: OTHERS? SELF? GOD?**

Take heed that you do not do your [alms] charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do [alms] a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do [alms] a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your [alms] charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

How many of you have done something just for show? Like putting up the flag on the Fourth of July, so others can see that you fly the flag? Like going to a visitation at a funeral home, just to put in your appearance? I remember in college, I went to a professor's special evening history films just perhaps to get on his good side—no kidding.

In our text Jesus talks about actual instances of church people just for show. The first is almsgiving. The word “alms,” which is the word the King James Version uses, is a strange word to our ears, but likely one you’ve heard. It comes from the Greek word “eleo” to have pity on someone. Thus, to do “alms” is to do something out of pity for someone, to help them out. The New King James translates, “do charitable deeds.”

Helping out those in need is something which the Bible very clearly commands. *Whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart of compassion from him, how does the love of God dwell in him? (1 John 3:17).* *When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleanings from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the LORD your God (Leviticus 22:23).* However, the devil being the deceiver that he is, easily convinces us to do alms and charitable deeds, not to help out—or not just to help out—but to do them for self-serving purposes, to gain notoriety or honor for self. These are “deeds for show”—deeds done to be seen by men; deeds done to be seen by me and make me feel good about myself; deeds done to be seen by God and impress Him. All wrong.

Take heed that you do not do your [alms] charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do [alms] a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. Jesus was always very perceptive. Perhaps many another who understood the truth of God's will, could also see the self-pride and the flaws in the Pharisees' actions. Evidently, if Pharisees were on their way into church and there was a cripple begging for alms at the door, or if they were walking down the street and met someone in need of assistance, they got out the trumpet, and had their aide blow it loudly, or blew it themselves. “Hey! Let a crowd gather to see what a magnanimous thing, what a “big” thing, I am about to do. Let others think of me highly in light of this tremendous gift I am giving-- just to help out, which I don't have to give at all.” Doing good for show. That's a true hypocrite. An actor, a pretender, a role-player.

Do you do good for show? Letting the boss or the teacher see what a good worker you are so that you get special treatment, doing hours of community service so that your scholarship application for college looks good, giving to a building project so that you get your name on the wall inside? Sometimes that may happen, that you get your name on the wall. But was that your purpose from the get-go? If so, it was not really godly almsgiving, was it? Then it's a “give-to-get” mentality. I will do this because I will get something back. Like an insurance company which supports community projects and offers, “If your group does a community project, we will help supply funds; but you have to display our name and credit our involvement for all to see.” Hmm. Serving others? Or serving self? .

Sometimes a person gives alms and helps out, not so much to be seen by others, but to be seen by SELF. It makes you feel good about yourself. Look what I've just done. What a good fellow I am! What a great gal I am! That is not godly almsgiving either. *But when you do [alms] a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.* Do not even take mental note of what you've done, do not add it to your list of "Christian" deeds that you've done for the day. Help those in need for no other reason than to help those in need.

And of course behind all this lies the thought, which also the devil puts into your heart, that "almsgiving" will impress God. "Hey, God, have YOU seen what I've done?! Do you see what a good piece of work I am? Now You will give me a break, won't You?" But it doesn't work that way. In such a case, *You have no reward from your Father in heaven.* Works that are done for show—to be seen by others, by self, or by God—accomplish only one thing—that they are seen.

Jesus knows all your proud efforts and thoughts too, all your self-serving motives and actions too. He knows them better than you do. Yet in love, He let the soldiers, the Jewish leaders, and each of us nail Him to the cross; and said, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). "I lay down My life for the sheep" (John 10). In Jesus, hypocrite that you are, serving self, self, self—you, nevertheless, have God's arms of forgiveness. Run to Him, not away from Him. In the name of Jesus' you are forgiven and righteous. Trust Him. *"The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).*

God does want us to love and serve others. Not for our own glory, for His. *Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).* Just as naturally as an apple tree bears fruit, so the Christian heart bears fruit for God. It may take some "training," letting the Word of God and the Holy Spirit working through that Word of God, teach you to know the love God has given to you and applying it to those around you. It's your new nature in Christ. It becomes second nature.

When you come to worship, don't do it for show. And as Jesus continues in our text, when you pray, which is worship, don't do it for show. *When you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.* Prayer, as with all Christian life, is between you and God. It is not to be done for show or to advertise what a fine Christian you are. Any part of prayer, or worship, or receiving Communion just for show, because you think it will look good and right to others, to God, or to your own self, is a dead-end street. True prayer comes from the heart. Talk to your Father in Christ from the heart. Be careful with memorized prayers, which all too often end up being recited just for show. Do you ever catch yourself, ending the table prayer with "Amen," and then immediately spout, "Do you know what I heard on the news today?" Hmmm. It's a give-away to yourself that your heart was thinking a lot about the news, and not much about your prayer and conversation with God. Prayer for show. It's the way of hypocrites and pretenders.

The deeds of the Christian are done out of a heart of love for your Savior, whether one consciously even thinks of it as being done in love to the Savior or not. Such actions are acceptable to God. He blesses you for them. Will He bless you *openly*? The text says openly. God does not blow trumpets and say to the world, I'm going to bless Dale or Marie because their Christian deeds were from the heart and not for show. But He does bless openly in your day to day life. His blessings are not secret. He gives you peace through Christ, contentment, joy, and daily bread as well. He forgives you for your sins of show, as well. Cling to God promised love and forgiveness in Christ. You are forgiven.

And a word of caution on this text. Jesus is here talking to you, about you, about your alms and deeds of charity, and about your prayers to Him. He is not talking to you about the people around you. Be careful not to judge the actions of your brothers and sister in Christ, in their relationship and deeds before God. Do not say, "She comes to church, just for show. He prays loudly at church, just for show. They sit . . . They dress . . . etc. just for show." Be considerate of your brothers' and sisters' hearts too. If you're going to judge them in these matters, then you are only promoting yourself.

Do not do alms prayers for show.

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach---