

The Sermon on the Mount: Life in the Kingdom

Sermon #4: Practicing Righteousness / When No One Is Looking

Matthew 6:1-18

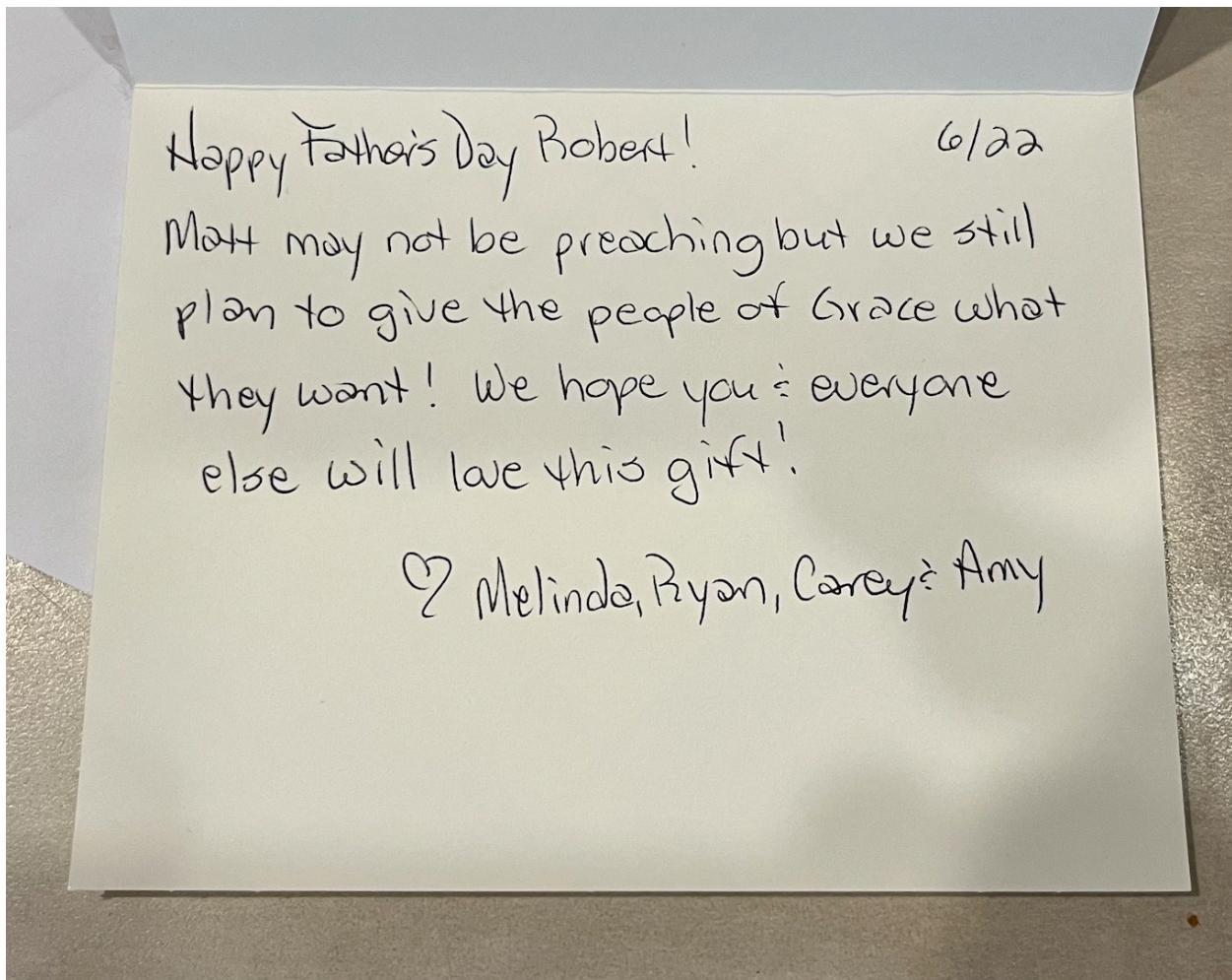
Robert Morris – June 19, 2022

Well, good morning, Grace! I'm glad you're here today. Let me explain, okay? So, on Thursday I come home from the office and I see this nice-looking gift for me on the table when I get home. And I start thinking, *Oh, how nice. Somebody's thought of me—one of my kids, maybe my wife ... Oh, good ol' dad, let's tell him we appreciate him with a gift.*

No, that's not what happened. I found this thing [Robert indicates the tie he's wearing.]



Now on top of that, if that wasn't a gut punch enough, I come to find out that a certain woman who lives in my house has been scheming with another wife of a certain pastor that we know and love to continue a particular tradition here at Grace since her husband won't be preaching here on Father's Day.



So, Melinda, Ryan, Carey, Amy ... you have given the people what they wanted, all right? An ugly tie on the guy standing on this stage. If you're wondering how the Cassidys are doing, apparently they have time for jokes now. By the way, I don't like where this is headed, so I may need to squash this. I don't like how this is spreading. I'm going to remove this. It's a distraction to me and I'm sure it's singeing your eyeballs. *[Removes the tie and throws it off the stage.]* Let's do that. I've done my due diligence, I've done what I needed to do.

All that to say, Happy Father's Day, men. For those of you who are fathers, or for those of you who aren't fathers but do the hard work of spiritual fatherhood, Happy Father's Day.

Men, our world is blessed when we do what we've been called to do, when we act and speak and love and live like Jesus Christ. And so, press on, men. Press on!

Today we're going to pick back up in our study on the Sermon on the Mount this summer. Kevin did a great job in chapter 5, and now we're moving on to chapter 6.

As we begin, I want to tell you about a day that I think my life changed. I know that's a bold statement, but I remember this day like it was yesterday, and I remember that I think that as best as I can tell, this day changed, I think, the trajectory and course of my life.

And it happened in a pretty odd place, I would say. It happened in a batting cage when I was in the ninth grade.



Now this guy, ninth grade Robert, had no clue what was about to happen to him. But something was said to him that has stuck with me for the twenty-six or so years later. And it's challenged me.

Now, granted, I want to give some credit here. I know that my mother, my father, my Sunday school teachers, my pastors probably said this thing forty different ways on three

hundred and something occasions, but for some reason, as a ninth-grade freshman in a batting cage, it hit for the very first time.

Coach Ronnie Coker said to a ninth-grade Robert Morris and a group of young men there, “Men, who you are when no one is looking is who you really are.” Now I think his first intent was just to inspire us to be the kind of ballplayers that didn’t need constant monitoring. If he left to go take care of something, he wanted to make sure that we were still doing the drills the right way. But he also knew he was shaping young men, so he threw this in there, and it stuck with me. And God impressed this on my soul in a way that I think really changed my life.

It’s still with me. I’m still talking about it. It’s one of the things that runs through my mind when I’m tempted to “go astray.” It’s a thing that also causes a little bit of sadness in my life that I’m still not quite the man I wish I could be when no one’s looking. I still want that desperately. The Lord still has much work to do in my heart that way.

Who you are when no one is looking is who you really are.

Now this idea is kind of the central theme or the main point of the passage that we’re going to be looking at today. Who are you when no one is looking, and what audience do you care most about?

So, let’s dig in this morning. If you have your Bibles and you want to follow along with us, we’re going to be in the Book of Matthew and we’re going to start in chapter 6, and we’re going to tackle the first eighteen verses of chapter 6 this morning as best we can.

Now in chapter 6, Jesus is continuing His kingdom manifesto. This sermon is His effort to put on full display what a heart transformed by this King and His Gospel looks like. And where we left off in chapter 5, Jesus had just set the bar really high, at an impossible high—the kind of impossible bar that you’re not going to be able to meet without some sort of external help.

And Kevin did a great job a couple of weeks ago talking about how Jesus begins to shift the way His disciples think. He is more concerned with their heart condition, not just with their external behavior. Jesus is going to demand inward heart obedience as well.

Jesus’ Instructions on Practicing Righteousness

And so, in chapter 6, Jesus gives His disciples some more instructions. And this one is specifically geared towards how their heart condition needs to match their outward practice of

discipleship. What He's going to call "practicing your righteousness." As they live out their faith, here are some potential obstacles.

So, He begins in verse 1 with this word "beware." He's warning them. Jesus is sounding the alarm. And that word there is actually in the present imperative tense, so it means to imply that this is something you need to keep doing over and over and over again. You never need to stop doing this. You've got to always keep it in the front of your mind.

Beware of what? Verse 1 says:

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven."

And so, we have this main idea, the thesis of what Jesus is about to lay out for us. He says, *Look, you're going to practice your righteousness*. He's already told them to let their light shine before men. He wants to live them in this world in a certain way. And it's going to be natural for disciples in His kingdom to demonstrate that by doing certain things externally. I think that's a fundamental human truth. A heart change will lead to different external behaviors. But a heart radically transformed by Jesus Christ will naturally lead to some different ways of living. But these actions have to be done the right way.

So, Jesus is going to follow up this statement, this "Beware ... be careful", with three examples of righteous acts. Sometimes your Bible will do you a disservice and separate those and put them in different sections, but it's really all one line of reasoning with this them verse in verse 1.

Each section is going to follow the same pattern.

- Here's what not to do. Look at how this is being done the wrong way.
- Here's how my disciples will do it instead. Here's the right way to do it.
- And the "why", or the reward for doing it the right way.

My disciples will practice these things differently.

Now before we dig into these three examples, I want to do a little bit of work on a couple of words that you're going to see over and over and over again in this section because I think it will help you gain even more appreciation for what Jesus is about to say. Those two words are "hypocrite" and "reward." He's going to use these over and over and over again.

The first word, “hypocrite”, is a word that Jesus uses a lot, especially in the Book of Matthew. And the origins of that word really come from the origins of Greek plays. This is describing an actor who would wear a mask to portray something in a very exaggerated way. It’s a show. They’re playing a role that’s not the real thing. They’re pretenders. Jesus is using this term to describe this attempt to appear to be something rather than be that thing.

The second word is “reward.” In the upcoming verse Jesus is going to use the word “reward” a lot. But there are three particular times when he uses this phrase: “... they have received their reward.” And when you see that phrase, the language behind that is actually a technical business term that was expressing that it was the end of the transaction. The business is done. There’s a receipt to show that it’s been paid for, we’re all squared away, everything is settled, nothing else is needed.

The hypocrites are not deprived of “their reward.” They’re just getting exactly what they hoped they would get, but they’re getting nothing more. And Jesus says that a kingdom person is after a different kind of reward.

And so, Jesus picks three things, three practices very central to the Jewish religious faith of that day and age, and He flips them on their head. These are the big ones. These are the ways that people marked spirituality. These are the ones that you did to demonstrate your seriousness about your faith.

Now we might, in our modern day and age, have different versions of this. I tried to brainstorm a few of them. Here’s what I thought:

- Changing your Facebook profile photo for the right cause
- Displaying a particular yard sign in your yard—but the right one, not the evil one like that other neighbor
- Volunteering for a certain non-profit organization.
- Being involved in some sort of cause

These acts of righteousness ... and Jesus is using these three exactly for their point, because these are the ones that measured whether you were spiritually healthy or not. And in every section, and every time He uses one of these examples, there’s going to be this turn in every section where He says, “But when you ...” *My disciples—my kingdom people. They’re going to practice these things differently. There’s a different ethic in my kingdom.*

So, let's look at each of these examples. Let's try and mirror a little bit if we can this morning, not just at these three. Let's keep in mind that there might be other examples of practicing our righteousness that might be better applied to our day and age. But I think that the same principle that we learn here would apply to those as well.

1. Giving

The first one is giving or generosity. In verse 2 it says this:

Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:2-4

That word there for giving to the needy is actually is a very close word to the word for “righteousness” that we have in our Bibles. It’s that close to the heart of God. Generosity or giving to the needy stood as one of these hallmarks of faith. In the catalog of good works this is one of the preeminent examples.

And Jesus says that these people are sounding trumpets. And some scholars believe that they were actually blowing horns. Some scholars believe this is a reference to the shape of the receptacles of where the money went in and it made a lot of noise. They were long and slender so that the money could go in but nobody could get it out. Some scholars believe it was just a metaphor for “tooting your own horn.” But the reality is the same. It’s the same point either way.

The giver is attempting to gain as much public honor as possible. The reputation for generosity over the actual relief of poverty is their main goal. That’s what they want. They want the ooh’s and ah’s of the crowd.

And Jesus is saying, *Look, you’re not in that scenario. You’re not giving there. You’re actually buying.* They wanted the praise of men, they paid for it, and they got it. But they’re not getting anything else. They’ve received their reward. They’ve been paid in full. They left the way better deal on the table.

“But when you …” Jesus says, “But when you—but when my disciples …” Jesus assumes that His disciples will be using some of the earthly resources that they’ve been given to help those who are in need. More on that next week.

He says, “Look, when you give …”—He uses this phrase—“don’t let the left hand know what the right hand is doing.” The way to avoid hypocrisy is not to cease giving, but to do it with such secrecy that you scarcely know all that’s being done. Simply, directly, discreetly, not gloating over how good the gift is. The giver is giving so much and in so many different ways that they readily forget all that they’re giving. There’s no scorekeeping, there’s no scorebook being updated. They’re giving from a pure heart with a different set of motivations.

So, Jesus might ask His disciples this question: Who are you when no one is looking? How do you give when no one is looking? Are you okay if no one on this earth ever knows how generous you are?

Prayer

Let’s move to His next example—prayer. Verse 5 continues:

“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” Matthew 6:5-8

So, Jesus critiques two ways prayer is being practiced. They’re doing it for show. They want to be seen by others. That’s the motive of their hearts. And there’s also this way of praying that’s just nothing but empty words or empty phrases, maybe mindless repetition.

The first one—they wanted to be seen by others. That’s the major fault here. This was for self-glory, a means of impressing other people with their prayers.

The Bible says they loved to “stand and pray” and that “they wanted to be seen by men.” Some scholars believed this was the actual practice, where a faithful Jew three times a day would

stop whatever they were doing and pray. And these men were beginning to make sure they were on the busiest streets at the busiest times of day when the hour of prayer came, so they could be seen by as many people as possible. And Jesus is saying, *Look, there's something very wrong with the human heart if you're planning your walks and your routines and your daily lives to be at the busiest place on the busiest street for maximum impact when the hour of prayer comes.*

Don't think that Jesus is necessarily saying that it's wrong to pray in those places. I think He's just noticing. He is knowing the human heart of these men, and He's saying this is not an accident. There's a heart motivation going on here. They were glad to be seen praying, they hoped to be seen praying. It was very public, on purpose.

That's why later on in the Book of Matthew Jesus would describe these men like this in chapter 15, verse 8: “**They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.**”

Now just so we're clear, I don't think Jesus is renouncing all public prayer. Otherwise I would probably negate everything I say here at the end of the service when I pray for us. Jesus himself prayed publicly. But as it becomes ritualistic, mechanical, inordinately long, repetitious, and in the worst-case scenario, ostentatious, it's being practiced in the wrong way.

One example of this in my own life that I really regret a lot is that I spent years in group prayer settings—small groups, different groups—not really actually listening to the prayers of others, but planning what I was going to pray when it was my turn. What is that, right? I wanted to say the right things, plan out the order in which I would say them so I would sound spiritual when I was praying for the right things. I know, I'm a recovering Pharisee and hypocrite.

Then Jesus moves on to the second faulty way. He says, “... to heap up empty phrases.” That word, literally, could almost be translated “babbling.” It's words, it's hollow. This was especially true of the other religions of that day and age. There was more, these incantations, these formal invocations. *If I say the right thing over and over and over again, the deity has to listen. Nineteen, thirty-one, seven ... ka-ching ... it's unlocked. Eventually I can get to the deity to do what I want.*

And that's why Jesus says, *Look, He knows what you need. It's about connection.*

Now what's terribly ironic here is that in just a few verses Jesus is going to give His disciples an example or model, the thing we call The Lord's Prayer. And I wish I had more time to dig into that today. We just don't have the time. But it's very ironic that for so many people it's become exactly what Jesus said it couldn't become, this mindless, repetitive prayer, instead

of what I think it is, which is a model, an example, that's trying to teach us that these are the kind of things that disciples pray about. Jesus says, *Not my disciples*. "But when you ..." *My disciples will spend time praying in the inner room.* Again, maybe the place isn't as important as the motivation. He says, *Look, my disciples are going to find a private place, a place where they can enjoy the real purpose of prayer, that communion with God their Father...* where there can be a singleness to my attention, just me and Him, nothing else to distract, not worried about side glances or who's hearing me; where I can focus on God alone.

And this public/private thing might be a good test of our motives. A person who prays more in public than they do in private may reveal something very serious about the condition of their soul, that it's not really spiritual health that they're after, but the appearance of spiritual health.

And Jesus is drawing a very stark contrast in the way His disciples are going to pray and the way the world prays. He says, *Don't settle for the microscopic reward of the approval of men.* There's a better deal on the table. There's a better reward waiting for those who go to the inner room. There's a reward of intimacy with God born out of years of relationship with Him. And it's worth so much.

When I thought about this section on prayer, I thought about a man from my life. When I was a kid, kind of late elementary/early teenage years, there was a man named Mr. Campbell who was part of the church I grew up in. Now I am not super proud of what I'm about to share with you, so let's just keep it between us and maybe, Facebook—(I don't know, I guess people are watching.) But maybe it was just youthful immaturity. But Winston Campbell was one of the deacons of the church we grew up in. And our custom at our church is that each week one of the deacons would take turns and pray. So, every couple of months it would be Mr. Campbell's turn. And Mr. Campbell was known for one thing at our church—long prayers. Long prayers! We're talking about how the worship pastor has to cut songs on a Mr. Campbell week.

Now again, please, remember this was a way less-sanctified Robert, I hope. But what me and my buddies started to do was, when we would see Mr. Campbell's name in the bulletin, before the service would start we would start taking bets on how long the prayer was going to last. And we'd time it on our stopwatch, because you weren't cool back then if you didn't have a stopwatch on your watch.

Now in my naïve immaturity and as a fledgling little Bible expert mini-Pharisee in the church I grew up in, I looked at the passage, I looked at how Mr. Campbell prayed. I thought, *Hey, isn't this what Jesus was talking about? Long prayers, booming voice, in front of a bunch of people ...*

God was good to me. Within a year of us starting this, the neighborhood I grew up in flooded and we had to go stay with Mr. Campbell's family temporarily. I know, right? It's getting good. I will never forget waking up early one morning, sneaking out to the living room, and I could overhear Mr. Campbell in his kitchen praying. And he didn't know I was there. And he was praying with the same fervor, the same zeal, the same energy for even longer. He was praying for my family and our home. He was praying for his kids and his grandkids and his church and so many needs of other people. And it clicked: *Oh, this thing you do on Sunday morning isn't for a show. You're the same man on a random Thursday morning at 6:00 am that you are at 10:30 on a Sunday morning. And not only that, but your little nine-minute prayer in a worship service isn't even a tip of the iceberg with how much time you spend in communion with your God.* And it clicked. I understood the passage. This man spent way more time in private prayer than he ever did in public prayer. And he spent a lot of time in public prayer—I just told you, he prayed long!

Jesus is saying, *Look, we need more Mr. Campbells.* I asked him one time, because this relationship during the flood actually turned into an open invite every Sunday after church for dinner with his family. And one day I noticed on his table the plate was wobbly. And I asked him why this table was crooked. And he kind of joked about it, but it's kind of like there were grooves in the table where his elbows hit as he bowed and prayed to his God. We need more Mr. Campbells, more men and women, more disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ who are wearing grooves in the inner rooms of their prayer lives when no one is looking.

And so, Jesus might ask you, *How are you doing when no one is looking? Who are you really when there is nothing to gain but an audience with the family, when there are no spiritual points to be scored? How are you doing? What kind of pray-er are you?*

3. Fasting

And then, finally, we get to Jesus' third example: fasting. He uses this example of fasting. It's one we're not as familiar with—we don't practice it quite as much as the other two. But He says this in verse 16:

And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Matthew 6:16-18

The context of fasting in that day and age is that there was only one prescribed fast for a person in Israel, and that was on the Day of Atonement—one fast. But what had begun to happen was the spiritual leaders had begun to add extra days of fasting in there. And it just so happened that they did this normally on the second and fifth days of the week, which were the big market and synagogue days of the week. And Jesus says, *Look, they're disfiguring their faces; they're painting their face in a different way to make sure everyone knows they're the kind of person who fasts.* It became a way for them to have this religious showmanship, or to gain a reputation for being righteous. They're actually changing the look of their face. They're hypocrites. They're playing a part.

And Jesus says, *No, no. But when you fast—my disciples, my kingdom, my people will not draw attention to themselves. They won't make any visible sign at all that a fast is being undertaken.* And Jesus, again, just like the others, assumes or implies that His disciples will fast. This will be a normal, acceptable part of life as a disciple.

And friends, if you're not as familiar with fasting, it's really simple. It's simply a temporary self-denial for a larger and greater spiritual purpose. It can be done with all kind of self-denials, but it's most commonly done by refraining from food. But it's this time a believer can enter into where they can find a concentrated and intense kind of prayer season over some work that you want to see the Lord do in your life or in the world. The true purpose of fasting is more connection with God at a greater level.

So why would you paint your face differently? Why would you want to make sure everyone knows? Why would you want to do it that way? It's supposed to be about you and me here. And Jesus says, *Look, do whatever you can to be normal.* Those things He says—anoint your head, wash your face—those are just the normal grooming practices of that day and age. Jesus might say it this way: *Take a shower. Brush your hair. Wear normal clothes. Don't act differently.*

And I know sometimes I've been in a situation where someone caught me skipping lunch and then asked me, "Oh, are you fasting?" or "What are you doing, why aren't you eating lunch?" And I feel bad, because I don't want to lie to them, but I need to tell them what I'm doing.

There's a quote by John Piper. He said it this way: "Being seen fasting and fasting to be seen are not the same." When no one is asking about your fasting and you're still doing it, that's where the reward is.

Now forgive me if this is you, but I thought of a funny example of this kind of contradiction we do sometimes. If this is you, please ... okay, I've shared my own stuff. A couple of years ago there was this trend of taking a fast from social media. But the one thing was that when people did it, they would generally write some lengthy post about their fast from social media to alert everyone about the upcoming fast from social media. And it always made me giggle a little bit. That seems a little odd, maybe, a weird thing to do—announce that you need a break from something in your life on the very thing you need a break from.

Now I'm sure there were some positive motives wrapped up in there—I want people to be able to connect with me some other way—but you also could have just stopped posting. I think the world would have kept spinning.

Now, again, don't write me an e-mail. There are forty different ways I play this silly game, okay? And I'm sharing those with you today. So, I'm in it with you.

But the reward for fasting is a deeper connection with God, not being a person who's known for fasting.

Jesus might ask you, He might ask His disciples, *How do you fast when no one is looking? Are you okay if you practice this deep and vibrant part of spiritual life and spiritual practice and no one ever knows if you do it or not, because you're more concerned about the deep spiritual need that you're actually fasting over?*

So, Jesus gives these three examples, all with the same point, with verse 1 being the main idea: “Beware of practicing your righteousness the wrong way.” And I think Jesus is trying to say, *Look, be righteous. Do righteous things. Practice your righteousness. Be the light of the world. Naturally, your faith is going to lead to actions. But my disciples practice in a different way. My kingdom people, when they give and pray and fast or do any other number of spiritual practices or righteous things, are after something else. As they’re living out their faith, they’re after a different kind of reward. Their hearts are in it for different reasons.*

And so, I think this leaves us with some pretty clear paths to applying this today. Because we want to apply this Scripture to our lives. I’m going to leave you with a couple of questions to consider and maybe a couple of ideas you might be able to try if you want to get involved in this.

Application

The first question is pretty obvious. Are you practicing your righteousness? Are you practicing your righteousness, like, at all? Every time Jesus implies that His disciples will be doing these things, your faith will lead you to action. But when you do this thing, it’s how you do it that matters.

Let’s just take a look at the three things that Jesus gave us. Let’s have some fun here. I think they’ll work for us. There might be some other applications you can make in other areas of life. But I think the principle of this would still work in other areas.

Giving. Are you a generous person when no one is looking? How’s your practice going? Do you care if your name is in the brochure or not? I know sometimes they’ll do that without you asking. But what if you specifically asked to not be named? What might happen in your spirit? And if you don’t like the idea of that, do you have the guts, maybe this week, to ask Jesus why that is? What’s going on in my heart, Lord? I get that sometimes your business might sponsor something and it’s important for advertising and the reputation of the community. But when you write that check or send that money or give that time, would you at least ask yourself whether you care if no one knew that you gave that money or that time. Would that satisfy your soul deeply in the same way? Or is there this twinge of you, like me, that still wants credit for being the generous person, the person who’s sacrificing, the person who’s using their resources in this way?

What if you tried to apply this this week or this month? Let's have some fun here. What if you just figured one place where you could give something with no expectation of recognition, reward, or anyone even knowing. What if you put cash in an envelope with no return address, you sent it somebody or you put it on someone's desk that you work with who you know needs something, just needs a little bit of extra money to buy diapers or formula? What if you paid for a meal for some random family across the restaurant and walk out before it's even noticed? What if you donated to the GoFundMe that you care about and gave big? I'm talking about give big, but then click the "anonymous" button so that your name doesn't show up in the list?

We can do this, friends. I'll tell you this. We've had so much fun as a family trying to find ways to secretly give. It's like a little secret mission. *How can we do this and someone not know about it? Is that possible? How can we pay for that for them and them not find out?* And we've made choices as a family sometimes how to periodically give with as few people knowing as possible. That's the goal. It's more fun that way. It's more fun to not let the left hand know what the right hand is doing.

How are you praying? Are you a praying person when no one is looking? What is your prayer life like? Is it more public than private? Is it more ritualistic—the same time every day, saying the same things over and over—19-31-7—rather than this glorious, two-way walkie talkie between you and the God of the universe who you get to call Father?

How's your inner room going? I know it's weird--when I had young kids, one of the best inner room places I could find where I prayed the most was the shower. It doesn't get much more "inner room" than that. There's not a lot of traffic. But find a place. Take the time. Wear grooves somewhere in some inner room.

How are you fasting periodically? Is that something you've done before? Is that something you're doing on a regular basis? You don't have to get crazy with this one. If you have medical challenges, you might want to consult with your doctor first about this. But it really can be as simple as this, friends. You can pick one day a month when you don't eat lunch and you spend that thirty minutes praying to God over some issue in the world or in your own heart and life. And every time that afternoon that you hear your stomach growl you can spend another quick moment asking for the Lord's help in that, or asking Him to do something.

And if you're like me, God still has so much to refine in me that you don't have to look very far for some kind of deep flaw or brokenness that the Lord still needs to work on, in me or

in the world around me. And I want to be the kind of man who wants those things so desperately that I would be willing to temporarily give up something like food. And if you know me, you know I love food! But I'll give that up. I'll give that up for a chance instead to have more connection with God on an issue that I'm struggling with, that I need help with, or something that I want to see happen in this world. You could do it once every couple of weeks. What might the Lord show you through this practice?

And so, how are you doing? How are you practicing? These are just a few ideas, friends. Let's practice these things, and let's practice so many other righteous things as we live out our faith. But I think the next question that naturally flows out of this is the second question for today.

What's your motivation? What's your motivation, really. I mean, what are you really after? What does your heart really want the most? Now one of the things I've discovered in adult life is that it is very hard for me to know my motivations and my heart without a lot of work. Why am I really doing the things that I'm doing? And I'll be frank—one of the great spiritual battles of my adult life has been coming face to face with the real reasons, the real motivations, the real whys behind why I do things. Even the good and socially acceptable things I do often have motives deep in my heart that I am not proud of. Getting to know my own heart has been terrifying. It reminds me of one of my favorite songs. The artist has a line where he says this about God—he's speaking about God: "He's every day lovelier and I'm worse than I thought." That's exactly how I feel as I get to the bottom of my motivations.

I'll give you one for-instance. For many years I tried to be a good husband and dad. I tried to do the whole pick-up-and-wash-the-dishes, pick up around the house, play with the kids as best I could. But I'll tell you, I spent years doing that mainly in the hopes of appreciation or some kind of reciprocating benefit. Scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. Really just wanting what I want ... I wasn't wanting to serve. I was trying to purchase something. And I knew that was the case, because whenever I didn't get what I wanted, my heart was exposed.

One of the things that's helped me this week as I considered this passage was this. There's a quote from a Scottish theologian named A. B. Bruce. And he said this about how we know when to show something, let my light shine before men, and how do I know when to hide something? He said this: "Show when tempted to hide, hide when tempted to show." In this life, many of the things we attempt to hide are often the things that we desperately need to bring into

the light. And the things that we are tempted to show—that's exactly when we might need to step back and keep that matter private.

And so, what's your motivation, really? Ask God. Would you have the courage to ask God to reveal those things to you? I think He's faithful to do that. He'll help you know where your heart really is as you practice your righteousness.

And so, friends, as we wrap up today, disciples of the King, disciples of this King, do righteous things. Oh, they practice their righteousness. They're getting a lot of good reps in. But when they do it, they do it a different way with a different motivation and for a different reward.

And so, we might ask ourselves ... “But when you ...” People of Grace Covenant Church, when you practice your righteousness, and you absolutely should practice your righteousness, Jesus might say to be aware of your motivations. Be aware of the why. Let's not be the kind of people who are only after the appearance of spiritual maturity, not actual spiritual maturity. Go after the real reward. And the real reward is a heart that wants a little bit more of that connection with God. And we know three different times in this passage, after each of these examples, it says this: that God knows and that God sees what is done in secret. He knows who you are when no one is looking.

And friends, I long for the day—I mean, I long for the day when I can answer that question of who are you when no one is looking; when I can say, *You know, that's when some of my best work happens. There's little or no difference between my inner life and my motivations and the outward practice of my discipleship.* I long for that day, friends. And in the meantime, the one thing I do know is that it will probably take a lifetime of working these things out. And it will be a long road to get to that point, I know. And I'm going to need God's help desperately to get anywhere near close to where my right and proper motivations are lined up with my acts of righteousness. I'll spend my whole life attempting to fight the urge to do all these right and wonderful things for all the wrong reasons.

And so, let's stop and pray and ask Him for that very thing. Let's come to Him now. He knows we need it already—right? That's what He said. But let's ask Him for it together. Would you pray with me?

Father, we come before you today in need, in great need of help in our lives. We want Your kingdom to reign and rule, and we want it to start in our hearts, Father. You still have so

much kingdom work to do in us. Help us, Father. Help us to not just practice our righteousness, but to do it in the right ways, so that we might have the better reward and not settle for so much less. Search us, O God, know our hearts. Show us where we still lack, where we still need to become like Your Son Jesus Christ. Help us, God, to live lives where our heart and our motives more closely line up with our external actions. God, we desperately need Your help. And so, we come humbly before You and we ask it in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.