

OUR REWARD FROM GOD

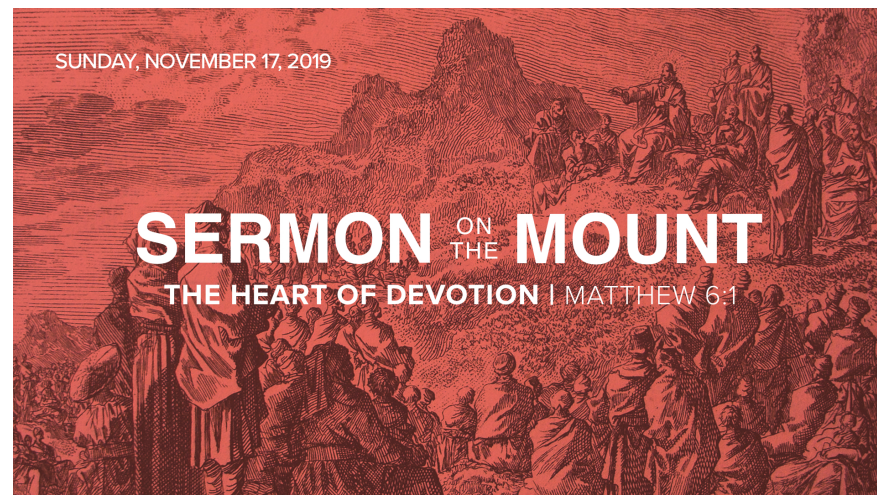
Jesus has already alluded to the expectation of reward in chapter five. In verses 11 and 12, he tells us, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven..." A few verses later, he asks, "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get (5:48)?" Jesus begins to flesh out the idea of rewards in chapter six. Three times he tells us those who practice their righteousness to be seen by others "have received their reward in full (6:2, 5, 16)." He follows each warning with the simple encouragement, "...your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (6:4, 6, 18). In verse 19-21, Jesus drives the point home:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also 6:19-20).

1. What are some of the rewards the world offers us?
2. How are these different from the rewards God offers us?
3. In Matthew 25, Jesus describes one of the rewards of faithfulness as "sharing in your master's happiness (see verses 21-23)." What do you think this means?
4. Why is "sharing in our master's happiness" or "entering into our master's joy" far more satisfying than anything this world has to offer?
5. According to Jesus, what must we do to "share in our master's happiness?"

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The "Catcher in the Rye" is a novel that walks through two days in the life of Holden Caulfield. He has just been expelled from Prep school and is fed up with the phoniness of the adult world. He's searching for answers. Early in the story, he observes, ""If you do something good, then, after a while, if you don't watch it, you start showing off. And when you start showing off, you're not so good anymore."

That little phrase captures the heart of the next section of the Sermon on the Mount. When we do good things for the wrong reason, they are not so good anymore. We can do what we do for personal gratification. We can do what we do to win the admiration of others. Or we can do what we do out of a heart of love and devotion to God. Jesus, of course, endorses the latter. He encourages us to do what we do out of devotion to God and promises we will be richly rewarded in our pursuit of him. Any other reward is fleeting, empty, and ultimately unsatisfying.

Chapter six marks a significant turning point in the Sermon on the Mount. Before we dive in, it might be helpful to think about the territory we have covered already.

Jesus opens the Sermon by describing **the character of the kingdom (5:1-16)**. Its blessings come to those who are poor in spirit, ...who are deeply grieved by the brokenness they see in themselves and the world around them. They turn to God with open hands to receive from him rather than relying on their own resources. They have a deep hunger for righteousness. They are agents of reconciliation. They will be misunderstood, hated, and even persecuted.

These are the people, Jesus tells us, who are salt and light in the world. People will see their good deeds and glorify their Father in Heaven.

Then Jesus describes **the righteousness of the kingdom (5:17-48)**—a righteousness that fulfills the law and prophets and exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. It is a deep heart righteousness that is not only concerned with murder but anger. It is not merely concerned with adultery, but an overactive fantasy life. It does not need an elaborate system of oaths to bolster its truthfulness. Yes is yes. No is no. It is a righteousness that embraces enemies as well as friends. It is a righteousness that is as complete and comprehensive as the righteousness of our Father in heaven. No half measures. No half-hearted efforts.

In chapter six, Jesus turns his attention toward **the practices of the kingdom (6:1-18)**. He focuses on three common features of Jewish piety—giving to the needy, prayer, and fasting. Conspicuous by its absence is Torah observance (or devotion to the word). He saves that for the dramatic conclusion of the Sermon, where he describes wise and foolish builders—contrasting those who simply hear the word with those who both hear the word and put it into practice.

The first verse of chapter 6 captures the heart and character of the three examples that follow. Jesus tells us,

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

This verse introduces us to the major themes we will encounter throughout the passage—the character of God, our devotion to God, and our reward from God.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

One of the striking emphasis in Jesus' teaching as a whole and the Sermon on the Mount, in particular, is Jesus' description of God as "Father." Jesus refers to God as Father seventeen times in the Sermon on the Mount. Ten of those references fall in the first eighteen verses of chapter six. While God is referred to as Father in the Old Testament, for the most part, these images come to us by way of metaphor, simile, or some other figure of speech. Here Jesus immerses us in the language of intimacy. God is not simply like a

Father, he is our Father. We find ourselves in a full-orbed Father/daughter (Father/son) relationship, with all the benefits of being his children.

1. What are some of the ways Jesus (and the rest of the New Testament) introduce us to God as Father?
2. How should knowing God as Father affect our pursuit of righteousness and devotion to him?
3. Why are we able to call God “our Father?”
4. What can we expect from God as our Father?
5. What should God receive from us (as his dear children)?

OUR DEVOTION TO GOD

An interesting reversal takes place when we move from chapter five to chapter six. When Jesus describes the character of the kingdom, he tells us, "let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven (5:16)." When it comes to the practices of the kingdom, Jesus tells us, "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them (6:1)." In other words, there are some things Jesus wants the world to see, and other things that we practice when we are alone with God or in intimate family settings. Our display of God's character should be on full display. Our friends should notice. Our family should notice. Those we work with should notice, Our acts of devotion are far more personal and private.

1. What are the acts of devotion Jesus highlights in verses 1-18?
2. What are some other acts of devotion (spiritual disciplines or means of grace) we might include?
3. Why are these acts of devotion critical to our walk with God?
4. What happens when we are more motivated by what others think of us than we are with pleasing God?
5. How should Jesus' call to secrecy impact our corporate worship and prayer with other believers (both of which Jesus and the rest of the New Testament encourage)?
6. What are some practical steps we can take to keep our motivations in check?