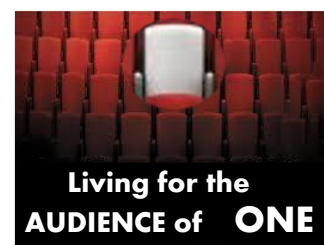


# Sermon on the Mount: The Audience of ONE (Matt 6:1-4)



## A. What Does Spiritual Maturity Look Like?

The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' greatest teaching on discipleship. Jesus shows the blueprint to growing in spiritual maturity. What does spiritual maturity look like in those who consistently walk in the grace of God?

- a. Ch 5 describes 8 beatitudes we are to grow in (5:3-12), and 6 temptations we are to resist (weeds, 5:21-48).

Ch 6 & 7 describes the kingdom activities to actively pursue in the grace of God (fertiliser, 6:1-21).

- i. serve (6:1-4, 19-21)
- ii. give (6:1-4, 19-21)
- iii. pray individually & corporately (6:5-13)
- iv. forgive & bless (6:14-15; 5:44)
- v. fast (6:16-18)
- vi. not worrying (6:25-34)
- vii. not judging (7:1-6)

They cause the 8 beatitudes to grow in our hearts, leading to receiving rewards from God. (Matt 6:4, 6, 18, 20).

- b. We must avoid the danger of legalism in pursuing spiritual activities. Legalism has really to do motivation. Why do we do what we do? To express our gratitude and love toward God? Or to impress people and 'earn' God's approval?
- c. The activities listed above is not exhaustive, but covers every area of our life. Jesus knows how our hearts work better than us! Our heart is deeply intertwined with these activities, and they impact our lives deeply! E.g., giving away money, praying, fasting, forgiving, etc.
- d. They are amazingly simple activities! Anyone can do them. No one is excluded from these activities. No special gift is required to serve, give, pray, forgive, fast, etc.

## B. Acts of Charity

Charitable deed denotes the activity of (i) serving and (ii) giving, motivated by compassion.

- a. Serving involves time and energy. Giving involves money. These two activities are intertwined. We give our time and energy in exchange for wages. Money is a way of storing our labour. Money is a means by which we can buy labour. So, money and labour are interchangeable.
- b. Serving and giving is the first thing we want to do when we first receive God's grace. '*How can I repay God for His goodness?*' (Rom 12:1) It is also the first thing the world looks for when they look at the Christian church. Hospitals, schools, charities etc, worldwide trace their roots to the Christian faith.
- c. Serving is a vital ingredient of Christian maturity. It is the pathway to true greatness (Matt 25:14-30). It is also one of the three pillars of Jewish Piety - serving/giving, praying, fasting. It is not easy to serve with excellent spirit over a long period of time in this age of consumerism. Serving is never convenient and it is often unappreciated by others and therefore discouraging.

## C. Principle 1: Need for Secrecy - The Audience of One - The Father is Watching

- a. 'Do not sound a trumpet' – Trumpet-shaped bronze funnel was attached to the 13 offering boxes in the temple to receive the offering. Everyone knew when someone gave a big offering just by listening to the loud clanging sound of the coins rolling down the funnel. (There were no notes in those days.) This system of giving was designed to induce the worshippers to give more.

Jesus repeated the very same warning for prayer and fasting (Matt 6:6; 18). In Jesus' days, the Pharisees prayed in the synagogues and on the streets because they scorned the silly temple practices.

We can do the same thing in churches and on the noticeboards while laughing at the Pharisees' silly practice. E.g., Public offering envelopes and long announcement on who gave how much. Watch out when you find yourself continually telling others what you did or how much you gave in the past, etc.

- b. *'as the hypocrites do'* - 'people with two faces,' 'religious spirit', 'legalists.' *The real damage in the long run is the silently growing cancer of the mixed motive in spiritual activities.* We can develop two 'faces'. Nobody knows what is going on inside, and at the time it seems to make no difference to us. But God sees, and it makes a world of difference over time.

Jesus: *'If the real reason why you serve in ministry is to impress people, then that is all you will get – reputation of being spiritual. But you have nothing further to receive from the heavenly Father who sees in secret.'*

The danger with seeking a reward before men is - we always receive less than what we feel we deserve. Therefore, we will always end up being hurt, and disappointed whatever the outcome.

*Why did Jesus emphasise the need for secrecy in personal spirituality? It is to protect our sincerity and devotion. The need for secrecy is the need for sincerity and freedom from being conceited.*

- c. Definition of 'Eye service'? (Eph 6:6): The story of a man struggling with serving in ministry after 6 months - instead of respect and recognition, he only got criticism. Was it all wasted? Certainly not, if we are seeking *God's reward over the long run, rather than men's applause in the immediate term.*

Every act of service we do:

- i. moves God
- ii. changes us (develops our character)
- iii. blesses people.

in that order.

We are all born with weakness in our character. Serving exposes our weakness and strengthens our character. There is no other way to maturity!

- d. I came across the term, The Audience of One. And I had to realign my heart over and over again. *'Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain; Yet surely my just reward is with the LORD and my work with my God.'* (Is 49:4)

## D. Principle 2: Father's Open Reward

- a. When we serve and give in love, though small and insignificant in themselves, the Father really sees every little detail of what we do. The Father receives our service and gift FIRST and PERSONALLY even though people don't appreciate it and what we do doesn't seem to make any difference. The Father will not fail to 'reward' us openly! We need this 'confidence' in all our serving and giving!

*'Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.'* (Heb 11:6) God is not passive, but active in responding to how we serve Him with little strength.

- b. Many Christians find the idea of reward a little uneasy because of :-
- i. Abuse, E.g., motivating the crowd to collect bigger offering.
  - ii. The paradox of reward vs love as a pure motivation for service.

But Jesus taught about reward more than anybody else in charitable deed, prayer, fasting... (Matt 6:4, 6, 18; 16:27). Jesus wants our heart to actively connect with His promise of reward, and disconnect from the applause of men. Reward is not the whole motivation, but it is part of biblical motivation. Some Christians feel they don't need any reward. But we need this motivation.

Jesus' very last word to the church was, 'My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work.' (Rev 22:12)

- i. Jesus knows something we don't know about our own hearts, how they work.
  - ii. Giving us reward is the Father's joy and desire, and an expression of His love and grace toward us. And it is the public demonstration of His affection toward us that will be all through eternity.
- c. There are 3 types of rewards.
- i. External
  - ii. Internal
  - iii. Eternal

We do not choose which one. The Father chooses how His reward will manifest, internally and eternally, or internally and eternally and also externally now.

At each stage, it gets better. The exchange rate is much bigger in eternal than in the external. Higher interest rate applies for the reward we receive in eternity, like deferred satisfaction. (Rev 2:7, 10-11, 17, 26-28; 3:4-5, 9, 11-12, 18, 21; 11:18; 16:5; 19:7-8; 22:12). Like Christmas gifts, we don't know what it is until we get to open it! It will be amazing when we all open our gifts together on the same day!

- d. The core message of Matthew Ch 6 is, 'God is watching at all times. And He is very generous. God responds to us every single time, even a cup of cold water we give to someone in love!'

And the more you are invested into eternity, the more real eternity becomes!

#### E. Principle 3: Embracing Voluntary Weakness

- a. In the Sermon on the Mount, there is a basic idea of embracing voluntary weaknesses. Giving up finance (giving), time (serving), energy (praying), reputation (forgiving), food (fasting), sense of control (not worrying), personal rights (refusing to judge), etc.

The Christian faith is NOT about using all my resources in a self-serving way. We offer them to God by voluntarily embracing weakness in the flesh, so that His power is made more perfect in us. 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' (2 Cor 12:9)

- b. Serving and giving is not for special people. It is the normal expression of Christian life.

#### F. Reflection

1. What negative motivation do you want to personally resist when it comes to giving, serving, praying & fasting? Why?
2. What motivations would you personally like to foster in spiritual activities? Why?