Live Before Your Father God

Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18

Key Verse: 6:4 “Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

The theme of chapter 5 is love which is the spirit of the law. According to Jesus, when we love, we fulfill all the law. Jesus showed the example on the cross. He prayed for those who nailed him on the cross saying, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*.” (Lk 23:34) Jesus showed us how to win over evil by doing good. In chapter 6 Jesus’ sermon on the mount continues. It has three parts, but each part has a clear common point, which is to do all before God.

First, giving to the needy (1-4) Look at verse 1. “***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.***” Here ‘righteousness’ means ‘a right relationship with God.’ Jesus teaches us what we must not do in order to have a right relationship with God. We must not become hypocrites. In chapter 6 Jesus mentions three acts of righteousness which are giving to the needy, prayer, and fasting. First, giving to the needy. Look at verses 2-4. “***So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 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. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.***” Giving to the needy and raising relief funds are commendable and praiseworthy. We see many rich people and companies donate huge amounts of money for needy people and organizations. Our church also annually donates a certain amount of money to several ministries and non-profit organizations. Giving to the needy and donation are good, but the motivation behind them is measured by God. The motivation for their charitable act is mainly for themselves, to show off their wealth and to gain honor and recognition. Jesus called them ‘hypocrites’ which means ‘play-actor’ in Greek.  Jesus warns us not to become hypocrites who do all for their self-glory.

What does Jesus teach us when we give to the needy? He said that when we give to the needy, we may not let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. How can our left hand not know what our right hand is doing? What Jesus means here is to do all in secret, not for showing off to get recognition. Then our Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward us. I know one godly woman who had compassion on one of her needy friends. She gave me a certain amount of money for her friend and asked me not to tell her friend who gave the money. She did not want to be recognized or praised by people. This is because she values the secret of God’s blessing, which is reward in heaven. I believe that she will never lose her reward in heaven.

Second, prayer (5-8) Someone said that prayer is the spiritual breathing. So, without prayer our soul cannot sustain as without breathing we cannot survive. So, prayer should be natural as our breathing is natural. There is no one who boasts about their breathing to call attention from others. “Oh! Look at me. I am breathing!” But the hypocrites in Jesus’ day did so. So, Jesus warns their hypocrisy. Look at verse 5. “***And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.***”

Prayer is also a communication with God. In prayer we talk to God and listen to him. When you walk with someone, you talk with them. Prayer is the same as talking while we are walking. So, we can pray anytime anywhere. I pray not only on the bed before going to sleep, but also in the car while I am driving. I can talk to God anytime, anywhere. But Jesus wants us to pray in a room. Look at verse 6. “***But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you***.” Jesus does not mean that we must go into a room whenever we pray. He meant that we must have a personal and quiet time with God the Father through prayer. Having personal prayer time with God is the source of joy. Jesus did the same. He said, “*Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.*” (Jn 16:24) C S Lewis said, “Joy is the serious business of heaven.” The joy of the Lord is my strength. (Ibrahim Omondi) Hymn “*In The Garden*” describes such a joy from deep and personal fellowship with God in and through prayer, “*And he walks with me, and He talks with me, And he tells me I am His own; And the joy we share as we tarry there, None other has ever known.*” Amen! I had a similar experience right after I was born again. I was so happy with Jesus who loved me, died for me, and gave me new life with him. I deeply fell in love with Jesus. At that time, I registered at UBF for one of the campus clubs and got a temporary space for a future club room. I made a small shelter and entered there to pray. I had a deep communication with Jesus by remembering John’s gospel. I made a confession of love to Jesus. At that time Jesus is everything to me. Even though this world disappeared, I was okay if I was with Jesus. Second, there was a backyard where I had a common life with other students in Seoul. Every morning, I got up and walked along the garden and sang the hymn ‘In the Garden’ enjoying a romance with Jesus. As the song says, “And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.”

Prayer is a communication with God by talking, asking, and listening. God who is unseen knows what we need before we ask him. He knows what we are going to ask when we enter a room. Therefore, we don’t have to say much, but enjoy time with God. Look at verses 7-8. “***And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him***.” One reporter visited Mother Teresa and asked about her prayer life. “When you pray, what do you say to God?” Teresa answered, “I don’t say anything. I listen.” The reporter shot back eagerly, “What does He say?” She replied, “He doesn’t say anything. He listens. And, if you don’t understand that, I cannot explain it to you.” Mother Teresa expressed her joy and peace in even her deep meditation. She mentioned her spiritual union with Jesus in her prayer. This reminds us of Jesus’ words, “*On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you*.” (Jn 14:20)

Some may think that prayer is wasting time. They say that they do something rather than kneeling down and praying. But Ryan Skoog said in his book “Lead With Prayer”, time spent with God is never wasted. Ryan’s father started a brand and his business became very successful within 10 years. An exclusive offer from a Fortune 100 company came to his father. But before signing the contract, his father spent one hour praying to seek God’s will. Proverbs 3:6 says, “*In all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight*.” After praying his father rejected the offer because God said, “No’ while he was praying. Several months later, the big company which had offered a contract became bankrupt. If his father made a contract with that company, his father’s business and his ten year’s investment might be gone away with that company. Likewise, his one-hour prayer saved his company and ten years’ investment. Time spent with God in prayer is never wasted.

Third, fasting (16-18) The third act of righteousness which Jesus mentioned here is fasting. What is fasting? Fasting is abstaining from food or drink for special purposes. Fasting in the Bible is purposed for focusing on prayer. In order to focus on prayer, they didn’t eat or drink. Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights before he started his messianic ministry. (Mt 4:2) In these verses Jesus teaches us not to fast in order to show off before people, but to fast before God. Look at verses 16-18. “***When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you***.” Why do people who fast look somber? They look somber to be recognized or be emphasized. But fasting should be done before God, not before people. Fasting is a solemn determination to seek God’s will and His help. It is not related to other people, but to God alone. But the hypocrites looked somber and grumpy to get sympathy and recognition from others. Some immature Christians brag about their fasting experience. They do not need to make an announcement before people because they did it before God. They consider such experience as a rank of spiritual maturity or a badge of achievement. But they do not know what Jesus teaches them today in verse 18, “*so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*” I am not a person who often fasts. My motto is ‘eat a lot and work hard’. But I fasted twice recently and my prayer got answered. One is a fasting prayer for one coworker’s exam for her certificate. The other is for my daughter’s board exam. Even though I skipped only one meal, God answered all my fasting prayers. How often God will answer my prayer if I fast every time for every prayer request! May God increase my fasting prayer as well as my personal prayer for God’s kingdom, this ministry, my coworkers, and my families. Amen!

William Carrey, known as ‘Father of world mission” said, "*In the sight of God and for the glory of God*!” As William said, whatever you do, do it all in the sight of God with pure motive and for the glory of God, for his name’s sake alone. Then your reward from my Father in heaven, who sees what is done in secret, will be great. Amen!