

The Question of Identity

- Broad strokes through this long passage
- Passage: Matt 6:1-18
 - **1** "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.
 - **2** "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.
 - **3** But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,**4** so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
 - **5** "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.
 - **6** 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.
 - **7** "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.
 - **8** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.
 - **9** Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
 - **10** Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
 - **11** Give us this day our daily bread,**12** and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
 - **13** And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

- **14** For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,**15** but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.
- **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.**17** But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,**18** 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.

- Pray
- I will be organizing my thoughts under 5 headings which are
 - Surpassing the Scribes and Pharisees
 - The Praise of Men
 - The Enemy's Strategy
 - My Public Relations Department
 - Owning my Identity

- Context: Sermon on the Mount (3 minutes)

- Jesus had just started his ministry and **appointed his apostles**. With the sermon on the mount, it seems like Jesus is laying **a foundation of who we are called to be**.
- He challenges long established ideals so as to show them **that what matters more than an act itself is the heart/motivation behind the action**. For example:
 - He revamps their idea of the **blessed life and what that looks like**, inverting what they believe is right. In the beatitudes, we see, sadly enough, that **what Christ**

exalts as being blessed is what we run from such as blessed are those who are persecuted, mourn, poor in the spirit.

- He **challenges and expands understanding of lust and love, and the consequences on anger**
- While challenging long established ideals, he reminds them that he is the fulfillment of the law, and sets what is impossible bar i.e. **your righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and pharisees**
- As Jesus sets forth a new way of life, what **the disciples must have realized is that they cannot even begin to approach this standard of life.** And the same is true for us.
 - The point though is to help us come to the end of ourselves, to help us see our need for Christ, to see that we are sinners, who are in need of a merciful Savior which is Christ.
- Wherever you might be today, everything happening to you can be **an opportunity for you to become more Christlike**, if you will be open to him. Why? Because you have a **Sovereign Savior, with Omnipotence at his disposal.**
 - As we journey along, try to let go of the worries of your heart and the to-dos in your head. Lay them down and truly be open to what the Holy Spirit says to you.
 - Let questions bubble up from within and hold it before God so that he might speak to you.

● Surpassing the Scribes and Pharisees (3 minutes)

- In Matt 6:1, Jesus starts out by saying
 - "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

- Why is Jesus warning them of this? To see the connection, we have to go back to Matt 5:20 where Jesus says
 - “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”.
- The scribes and pharisees get a bad rap but they were people who thought they were laboring to uphold the law. **They were the religious elites who fasted twice a week, and prayed often and tried, by their effort, to not sin. Misguided they were but they were no slouches**
 - So when the apostles (mostly uneducated men) hear that their righteousness must surpass the scribes and pharisees, you can imagine they are scratching their heads at the impossibility of the ask.
- Having told his disciples of the **superior righteousness expected of them**, Jesus warns them of the **pitfall of hypocrisy which is tightly coupled with self righteousness.**
- It is our tendency to **rely on good acts as a basis of right standing with God**, and more than that, **it is our tendency to validate ourselves, hence the warning** in Matt 6:1
- The word righteousness is “dikaiosyne” which means “**deep, attractive inner goodness.**” You could call it **true inner goodness.**
- What I want to draw out here, is a theme we will see repeated: **the theme that the righteousness that supasses that of the scribes and pharisees is not simply about the act but about the motives/reason behind the actions.**
 - Said in another manner, **the righteousness Jesus advocates for is more about who you are becoming, and the end goal is becoming more and more Christlike.**
 - In the examples within this text, you will note that **Jesus zones in on the motives rather than the seeming acts of righteousness. The actions themselves are not in question, it is the “why” behind the actions.**

- A natural question that comes to mind is why is Jesus focusing so much on the heart behind our actions?

● The Praise of Men (10 minutes)

- As a people, **we care so much about what others think about us**. We strive and work hard to present **an image that represents us in the best light possible**. We are not okay with **being good enough, we want to be fantastic and superb**.
 - And even when we are fantastic and superb, **the moment we hear someone else is better, we can't sleep**. It's almost like we this insatiable need/craving to prove that we are better
- This **malady affects both the young and old**. Whether it be with respect to **looks, your grades, educational accomplishments/pedigree, talents, professional success, marriages, the progress of your kids**, etc.
- A ravenous hunger for the praise of men is **weight and sin that clings so easily**. Here are a couple verses highlighting the depth of this malady in us
 - John 12:42-43
 - Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; **43** for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.
 - John 5:43-44
 - **43** I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. **44** How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

- Mat 15: 7-11

- **7** You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: **8** "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; **9** in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." **10** And he called the people to him and said to them, "Hear and understand: **11** it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person."

- Question for you

- **In what area of your life are you craving acceptance (or fearful of rejection) that makes you reject God or compromise on what you believe?**

- **Where are you craving the adulation of men?**

- **I know I have to fight this every single time I come up to teach.**

- **Even in preparing the sermon, I have to fight the inclination to find something I think people want to hear rather than what God might be saying**

- **I have to remind myself that it is not about my preparation but about His Glory**

- The praise of men **perverts godly acts** and renders them null and void.

- The challenge with the praise of men is that **we have a great capacity for self deception. The power of self deception is that we are truly deceived and thus, we think we are serving God when what we are really after is the praise of men**

- The burden of the praise of men is a terrible one and pervasive one. Here is what AW Tozer says about this burden of self love/self righteousness

- **Let us examine our burden. It is altogether an interior one. It attacks the heart and the mind and reaches the body only from within. First, there is the burden of *pride*. The labor of self-love is a heavy one indeed. Think for yourself whether much of**

your sorrow has not arisen from someone speaking **slightingly** of you. As long as you set yourself up as a little god to which you must be loyal there will be those who will delight to offer affront to your idol. How then can you hope to have inward peace?

- The heart's fierce effort to protect itself from every slight, to shield its touchy honor from the bad opinion of friend and enemy, will never let the mind have rest. Continue this fight through the years and the burden will become intolerable. Yet the sons of earth are carrying this burden continually, challenging every word spoken against them, cringing under every criticism, smarting under each fancied slight, tossing sleepless if another is preferred before them.
 - Such a burden as this is not necessary to bear. Jesus calls us to His rest, and meekness is His method. The meek man cares not at all who is greater than he, for he has long ago decided that the esteem of the world is not worth the effort. He develops toward himself a kindly sense of humor and learns to say, "Oh, so you have been overlooked? They have placed someone [Pg 113] else before you? They have whispered that you are pretty small stuff after all? And now you feel hurt because the world is saying about you the very things you have been saying about yourself? Only yesterday you were telling God that you were nothing, a mere worm of the dust. Where is your consistency? Come on, humble yourself, and cease to care what men think."
- Humbling, right... **I can see shades of myself in every point he makes**
 - The real issue though **is that of identity, it is that of value and worth, and this is the theme Jesus tackles over and over again in Chapter 6**. This is why Jesus focuses so much on our hearts
 - Jesus focuses so much on the heart **because this is where Satan's arrows are aimed. If he can corrupt our hearts (what we think and believe), he pretty much can dictate our actions**

- **If we are to know and enjoy the abundant provision of the Father, if we are to walk in our identity as children of God, if we are to become Christlike, exhibiting a righteousness that surpasses the scribes and pharisees, we must not be ignorant of the how Satan seeks to rob us of that experience.**
- **He does so, primarily, by deceit.**
- The Enemy's Strategy
 - I want to take a quick detour to talk about how Satan's attacks us and why the praise of men is a favourite weapon of choice.
 - What we believe, which informs what we do, is a critical foundation of our freedom in Christ and experiencing the Sufficiency of God.
 - If the enemy is **oppose the Kingdom of God**, and the disciples of Christ, he must corrupt what we believe. **Primarily, the enemy seeks to subvert our identity for if he can do this, he can make us move to his every whim**
 - Satan cannot make us do anything. **He has no direct power of you or me. Therefore, his only strategy is to deceive us.** To get us to do his bidding, he has to fool us.
 - And if he can fool us into basing our identity on the wrong foundation then we **become tools in his hands.**
 - In **1 John 2:15-16**, scripture lays out the 3 spiritual dynamics by which Satan deceives us.
 - **15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world--the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions--is not from the Father but is from the world.**

- The world in the above passage is not the created world of nature, or the many great things that make up human culture. John is specifically referring to ideas, values, perspectives, mindsets that are opposed to God
- Some translations might have the word lust in place of desire, which is accurate. However, desire is more appropriate here, as we tend to associate lust primarily with sexual temptation. And this passage is speaking about desires out of bound - excessive desires that **go beyond the confines of what God prescribes as good.**
- I want to emphasize that **desires in and of themselves are not evil or bad.** We are made to have desires. **Desires is often a key part of determining our gifts, our talents, what we are passionate about,** and maybe who we are becoming.
- Here are simple definitions
 - The desires of the eyes = wanting to look good in front of others
 - The desires of the flesh = wanting things for myself
 - The Pride in possessions = wanting to appear important
- **The strategy of the enemy is to always take what is good, and then twists it into what is evil, especially on things that we need or that are innate to us**
- **In the 3 subsequent examples in the text Matt 6:1-18, we see Satan corrupting the desire to please God and turning that into the desire to receive the praise of men, the desire for recognition and for a shining reputation**
- Having seen how Satan seeks to attack us, let us delve into the examples Jesus gave from Matt 6:2-18

● My Public Relations Department (10 minutes)

- Matt 6:1, which is

- "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"
- Sets the stage to highlight three chief acts of Jewish piety - almsgiving (vs 2-4), prayer (vs 5-13) and fasting (vs 16-18). In each act, the logical structure of the text is as follows
 - A warning to not live for the praises of men
 - A guarantee that those who seek the praise of men will end up with the empty praise of men.
 - An reorientation to God as the one you should seek to please...it's a restoration of the right desire, the right order
 - The reward of the Father - namely Himself
- In looking at this structure, I want to draw out two primary points
- The Guarantee of Emptiness
 - Let's start by reading select scriptures from Matt 6:1-18
 - **2** "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.
 - **5** "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.
 - **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.
 - The word hypocrite here suggests that **Jesus is talking to us believers not unbelievers. Jesus is directing his piercing words right at our hearts, right at the Mercy Hill Church**

- What is evident in these verses is that we see the thirst to be recognized for our efforts, even in religious circles and for our reputation to be exemplary
- And **sadly enough all we get when we follow after the praise of men, is just tha... the praise of men.** What more, we know the praise of men is very much dependent on "**what have you done for me lately**"
- And so we are caught in a rat race, **always looking to produce so that we are recognized.** We compromise our values and invert our priorities all for recognition. **This thirst for a stellar reputation and recognition is not a reward, it is a curse.** It is a curse because we become are under its burden and yoke.
- **And this is exactly how our identity becomes based on performance and production.** Said another way, our identity is being formed based on:
 - The desires of the eyes (I want to appear and look good before others)
 - The desires of the flesh (I want to be recognized and I want to be significant)
- Yet Jesus invites us to carry a different yoke. He offers us rest from the rat race of recognition and our reputation in Matt 11:28-30
 - **28** Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."
- So unless **we accept the invitation of Christ, we will continue carrying the burden of this rat race that can only lead to emptiness.**

○ God is my Audience

- Again, let's read some select scriptures from our text (Matt 6:1-18)

- **3** But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,**4** so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
 - **6** 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.
 - **7** "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.
 - **8** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.
 - **17** But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,**18** 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.
- There is a clear theme of a public showing vs private secrecy, and our hearts tend towards the public showing to garner the praise or maybe at times the sympathy of men. It shows up
 - when someone speaks of how they were reading psalm 91 and managed to memorize two verses and you gently say "it only took me 20 minutes to memorize Psalm 91"
 - It's when as a parent, you subtly choose to gush over the successes of your kids, knowing that it will reflect positively on you
 - **What Christ calls us to is a reorientation to God as the one we seek to please. We live, and move and have our being in Him. He is the centerpiece of our lives and our frame of reference. In essence our identity is based on him.**
 - Our value is no longer in what we can do. Our worth is not based on our performance. Rather, our value, our worth is simply based on this truth found in Romans 8:32-35:

- **32** He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? **33** Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. **34** Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. **35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

- Our identity is simply this: we are the **beloved children of the Most High God**. Why? Ephesians 1:4-5 says:
 - He (Christ) chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love **5** he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will

- And the manifestation of the reward that Christ promises can literally be anything that your Good and Sovereign Father has in mind for you.

- Regardless of the specificity of the reward, **what God ultimately gives is Himself. God has no greater gift to give you than himself.**

- **The greatest gift God gives are not things; it is not wealth or health; it is not accomplishments or accolades. It is not the marriage you seek nor the kids you want to have.**
 - Why isn't it any of the above?

- In this world, **everything we have or come across is temporary**. It is passing away and it will ultimately pass away. **There are no permanent foundations here**, no fixed security in all the aforementioned gifts.

- **This is why God gives himself for he is permanent and eternal. And this is why the greatest gift God gives is himself.**

- In God, **we have the eternal hope and security we long for, which Jesus accomplished for us "as he was delivered up for our trespasses and raised up for our justification"**.

- In Him, we get to lay our heads upon the pillow of God's Sovereignty.
- How then do we lay hold on the truth that we are the beloved child of God?

● Owning my Identity

- Interwoven into our text are 3 directives from Christ, that I want to touch on
- Prayer
 - Adore, Surrender, Knock - please review the last 4 messages taught by Nick Weber, and this is why I didn't focus on the Lord's prayer here in Matthew 6
 - The paradigm of Prayer is NOT a list of requests, it is more about a relationship
 - Prayer primarily exists to change you i.e. to align you to the heart of God
- Forgiveness
 - Right after the Lord's prayer, there are two verses on forgiveness
 - **14** For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, **15** but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.
 - What **empowers your forgiving others is seeing your own depravity and the grace God offers you.**
 - When you truly understand the extent to which you have been forgiven off, your disposition would, increasingly, be to forgive. This doesn't mean you forgive instantly or you don't wrestle with forgiveness.
 - What this means is, **with the help of God, you will get to the place of forgiving those who've hurt you as you gaze on God**

- **The more you see him, his goodness and his greatness, the more you see that He is a righteous judge and you can entrust the situation into his hands, not so as to seek retribution, but so that he makes all things right. And that em**
- What forgiveness is not
 - Forgiveness is not forgetting
 - Forgiveness isn't necessarily the same as trusting the offender
 - Forgiveness and entrusting things to God doesn't mean he will punish the offender. Forgiveness is handing it all over to God and trusting that He will do right whatever it takes to make it alright.
- Forgiveness primarily is about restoring the relationship between you and God. Forgiveness is an act of worship unto God.

○ Secrecy

- To be clear, **there is nothing wrong in giving or praying in a public setting. There is nothing wrong with someone else knowing you are fasting.** What is wrong is **when any act is carried with an eye towards receiving praise of men.**
- In addition, Jesus talked about being the salt and the light, letting our lights so shine before the world so that God may be glorified and how we are a city on a hill that cannot be hid (Matt 5:13-16).
 - **The call is that we do all things with an eye towards glorifying God and not ourselves. And when praise is given to you, you guard your heart against thinking you are just that good or the stuff of legends**
- In a sense all that is around us teaches us to literally blow our own trumpets. Sometimes performance evaluations in the corporate environment is nothing

more than an opportunity to blow your own trumpet. It is the avenue to show just how great you are.

- Yet Jesus invites us into another way, a way that he himself fully embraces:
 - **Jesus often told those whom he healed to keep it a secret (Matt 8:1-4, Matt 9:30)**
 - **Jesus himself often withdrew to lonely places to pray (Luke 5:16)**
 - **Jesus would often try to sneak away from the crowd so as not to draw attention to himself**
- To help tame our hunger for the praise of men, fame or justification, we abstain from causing our good deeds & qualities to be known. We may even take steps to cover our tracks as long as it isn't deceitful or sinful
- Let me read a beautiful summary of secrecy by Dallas Willard (from the book Spirit of the Disciplines)
 - Secrecy rightly practiced enables us to place our public relations department entirely in the hands of God, who lit our candles so we could be the light of the world, not so we could hide under a bushel (Matt. 5:14-16). **We allow *him* to decide when our deeds will be known and when our light will be noticed.**
 - Secrecy at its best teaches love and humility before God and others. And that love and humility encourages us to see our associates in the best possible light, even to the point of our hoping they will do better and appear better than us. [yeah...that's not me]
 - It actually becomes possible for us to “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than ourselves,” as Philippians 2:3 advises. And what a relief that can be! If you want to experience the flow of love as never before, the next time you are in a competitive situation, pray that the others around you will be more

outstanding, more praised, and more used of God than yourself. Really pull for them and rejoice for their successes. [That's a hard prayer]

- If Christians were universally to do this for each other, the earth would soon be filled with the knowledge of God's glory. The discipline of secrecy can lead us into this sort of wonderful experience.
- **What I have just read seems like utopia...like an existence on the other side of the cross but it is what God invites us into, here and now.**
- What empowers secrecy is that we have handed our desires and our fate over to God. We simply do not throw away our desires, **rather we place it in the hands of a Loving and Sovereign Savior**. It is this same savior who offers his OWN SON as a substitutionary atonement (a replacement to atone for our sins).
- In secrecy we are experiencing a depth of relationship with God independent of the opinions of others. We have God and only God as our singular focus
- We practice secrecy in faith, depending on God. And as we see God come through on our behalf, we understand that we can fully abandon outcomes into His hands.
 - There is uncertainty in the practice of secrecy and quite frankly in our walk with God. We are uncertain because all that we've been taught and all we have seen in the world around us teaches us to scheme, to trumpet our praises, to perform so we can be recognized
 - And yet the uncertainty of secrecy is a means of grace. For the uncertainty and powerlessness in secrecy becomes a platform for God to display his power and grace hence the word **"my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in your weaknesses"**
- Slowly but surely we come to understand that we do not need to perform and that our identity is based on the truth that we are the beloved children of the Most High.

- **When we see God meet needs because we have asked him alone, in secret, our faith in God's presence and care will be greatly increased.**
- And this identity of being a beloved child of God frees you to live with God as your primary audience, the one you seek to please.

● Conclusion

- In conclusion, you are not your reputation and the recognition you receive. You are not what you do. You are not what gives you significance, and you, surely, are not what you possess
- If there is anything certain about life on this earth, it is the transient and transitory nature of our lives. There are no permanent foundations on this side of eternity. There are only tenths
- We can only rest the truth of Ephesians 1:5
 - **In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will**
- So you and I can rest on the fact that **we are the beloved children of God.**

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- When God called Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldeans, he made certain promises to Abraham and one key component was that of the land of Canaan. Read this text with me from Heb 11
 - **8** By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. **9** By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. **10** For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.
- Do you know that Abraham actually never owned a piece of land till his death apart from the plot of land he bought to bury Sarah in. He lived out his life in tents. So did Isaac and Jacob. 3 generations lived in tents after God promised them a land
- What then should we make of this? Is God a liar? Is this God's cruel joke on a man who actually believed him?
 - I know some of you might be in this very place where you are asking yourself the question "where is God in the midst of my pain and suffering...why is my way hidden from God, why has my cause being continually disregarded by my God?"
- I do not have specific answers but we know from scriptures that Abraham's descendants eventually inherited the land. We know that the promise to bless the whole world was fulfilled in the person of Christ as he ushered in the availability of the Kingdom of God to everyone, both Jew and Gentile.
- Therefore it is this past faithfulness of God that we rest our faith. It is on the cross of Christ that we rest our faith. So like Abraham we look to a city with permanent foundations whose builder and designer is God.
- Basically we look to the gift that God gives, the gift of Himself.