

The Giving of Alms and the Secret Works of Faith

Matthew 6:1-8, July 19, 2015

Trinity Sunday VII

Sermon Text, Matthew 6:1-8 (KJV)

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.”

Beloved of the Lord.....To the glory of God let it be said this morning, there has been little need in our congregation to preach on the subject of giving to church, because financially things have been relatively stable in this congregation for years, and the fruits of faith are evident. But from time to time the subject does indeed come up in our text, and today is one of those days. Moreover, most of us know that in many churches today, contributions and gifts to church is a favorite subject of many pastors. In the bigger churches they are always trying to raise money for one project or another. Many pastors wrongly teach that we must tithe, and some insist also that the amount you tithe must be based off of your income BEFORE taxes. Other pastors try to guilt a person into giving, using Christ's suffering to make a person feel guilty so they give out of guilt rather than faith and love. There are many ways to improperly teach the subject of how to give to church or what to give, and there are also pastors who make multiple laws and commandments about it. For example, the fellowship known as Concordia Lutheran Conference teaches that each congregation must provide their pastor a full salary so he can devote all his time to the Lord's work without any side jobs, but the Lord does not specify such in the Scriptures, and they have drawn a line God has not drawn. That is legalism. This is similar to pastors telling their members to report their gross income, so the church can determine and tell the member how much they are supposed to give.

But all these commandments of men are contrary to faith and the Gospel. By way of God's law we should learn that we have been poor stewards of our money and income, and quite often we live in a selfish manner which hoards God's blessings rather than freely distributes them according to faith. But when Christ and the Gospel is preached, all of these sins are taken far away and buried in the depths of the sea, and we hear Jesus say "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." His first love creates within us a returning love for God, love which gives happily and cheerfully without guilt, fear, or compulsion. His first love we call grace, which makes us secure in our salvation so we do not fear sin's condemnation because Jesus has purchased life and heaven for us. Knowing this wondrous salvation, there is a joy which lives in our hearts which now wants to do and give all things to God's glory. Now there is no line which we must struggle and strive to cross over in our giving, because Jesus crossed every line Himself when He offered

up His body and soul to God for our sin. Jesus has crossed all finish lines. He has kept every commandment in our stead, and knowing Him who loved us we have crossed over every line as well. He has pulled us across the line so we now live in His Kingdom of Grace where love fills every heart. Love sees no lines, love sees only Christ, and love is happy to do all.

I. Concerning the giving of alms..... Our lesson begins today with the words, "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven." This means BEWARE of how you give to church, or contribute your offerings. You should not give in order to be seen of men. If you want other people to know how faithfully you give, or how faithfully you tithe, or how you helped out this or that person with money because of their need, who are you trying to please, God or men? If you truly were trying to please God, you would not be telling other people about your works, but that would be between you and God. When we make known to other people our good works, "to be seen of men" we reveal that our works are evil. God cannot nor will not bless the proud heart that brags of works, for such works are sinful and devilish because they do not serve God's glory, but man is seeking praise.

"Therefore when thou doest *thine* alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." Now, it wasn't the case that the hypocrites actually blew a horn every time they put money in the collection box, but Jesus teaches here that true faith does not broadcast its own goodness, for God alone is good. If you seek acknowledgement for the good you have done because you seek the praise of men, you are not seeking God's praise nor God's glory. Therefore you merit God's wrath by the way you give your alms. Thus let us distinguish between the true Christian faith, and the false religions of this world. The heathen faith is all about show, looks, and appearance, but the Bible says, "*The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*" In our giving to church, or doing good works to help and aide people, no matter how good it may appear on the outside....God looks within our hearts to see if we did this good because we love Jesus and were thankful for our salvation. Likewise when Judgment Day comes, there will be countless false Christians who think they are going to heaven because of all the good they have done in life, but they will be eternally condemned because they never acknowledged all their evil, nor did they put all their trust in Jesus for forgiveness. The truth is believers know their works are evil and they fall far short of God's glory, but they also know Jesus kept all of God's commandments for our sake and we are forgiven and redeemed by His blood alone. Jesus therefore wants all broken sinners to come to Him for forgiveness, but those who are not broken cannot come.

When it comes to what a truly good work is, it is crucial we remember the passage which says "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." The outward deed or doing means nothing to God, except it come from faith in Jesus and love for God and man in our heart. Without faith then it is impossible to please the Father. This is why when we teach our catechism students what a good work truly is, we emphasize over and over again the catechisms proper definition of a good work. It reads, "*In the sight of God a good works is everything that a child of God does, speaks, or thinks in faith according to the Ten Commandments, for the glory of God, for the benefit of his neighbor.*" Thus if we put our offerings in the plate because we know Jesus' love, and by faith we desire Jesus and His Gospel be preached for the salvation of souls, this is pleasing in God's sight, and God will reward such a faith.

But often in our giving this is not the case. Sometimes we give grudgingly and not cheerfully, because we are thinking of all those bills we have to pay, and now this money is gone. Or perhaps we were taught to tithe when we were young (and keep in mind it is not sinful to tithe), but it was taught as a law and we never learned the passage that the Lord loves a cheerful giver. Or perhaps we know the Lord loves a cheerful giver, but we have little cheer when we give. Or perhaps for years we have faithfully given to the best of our abilities, but we have this attitude which says, "If it were not for my faithful contributions, this church would not survive." We look down upon others

whom we assume are not giving as they should, and we are bearing the burden which we resent. All these examples should reveal our sin and guilt before God. These are sins Jesus paid for. Much or most of our giving doesn't really come from faith, the fruits of the Gospel, but it is the giving of our flesh and not our spirit.

But how then should we give? Jesus said, "when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly." The illustration of the left and right hand simply means what we give is a secret work of the heart by faith. Proper giving is done secretly by faith because in the giving we seek neither the praise nor adoration of men, but THE GIVING IS praise and adoration of God in itself. It is a freewill offering which came from a free will, not a will that was wrapped in the chains of God's law, but a will which was freed of all chains by the Gospel. Faith works by love. Faith does not work by bondage. And when our Father in heaven sees this freewill, this love which cannot but help to thank God with its gifts, the Father will reward such openly. What is this open reward? Often He blesses us temporally on earth in various ways which neither we nor other people can see, but on the Last Day our reward will indeed be "open". Though we suffer poverty and contempt on earth, when Christ appears in the skies, no one will be able to deny, these are the sons and daughters of God. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

II. Concerning Prayer. Since faith and love for God is a secret matter of the heart, the same is true when it comes to prayer. Jesus did not approve at all of the hypocrites in His day, who loved to pray "standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." Their reward was that men perceived them as holy, but their prayer life was a big show. Jesus therefore instructs those who truly repent and believe in Him, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." Here again note the secret nature of a truly good work, for true faith in Christ is the invisible faith of the heart which does not seek its own glory.

Proper prayer then to God in heaven above, is a personal and private conversation between our soul and God. This does not mean that we must physically enter a closet (of course), but Jesus is teaching us that prayer is a private communion with God where we need to be separate from all other distractions. Public prayer (by the way) is not sinful either, but even here in church when we publicly pray, we do so properly only when we do not allow our minds and thoughts to be distracted as we speak with our Father above "who art in heaven" and "hallowed be His name."

Therefore when you pray "use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." Unbelievers, the heathen, always pray in the same way, vain repetition, because they are trusting that by their works of multiple prayers, they will be heard. But we Christians know better, or should know better. The only reason God hears our prayers, is through the mediation of Jesus Christ, which is quite different from Mary. First Timothy 2:5-6 explains, "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all." When the Pope teaches the Rosary, multiple prayers to Mary and multiple "Our Father's" he is teaching contrary to Jesus who said, "use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do:"

Finally beloved let us remember Mary didn't die on the cross for our sins, but Jesus did die to save Mary and us, and the whole world from all sin. All who repent of their sins and believe and trust in Jesus alone, will surely be heard by their Father in heaven, "for Jesus' sake". Therefore "Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." Whatever your petition, whatever your need, God knows it well before you pray, but your Father does want you to pray because this shows you trust Him above all others. And since He is a good and gracious Father that loves you for Jesus' sake, He invites you to come to Him

with all your problems and needs, and He promises to help you for Jesus' sake through Jesus' name. Therefore "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Amen.