

Series: Treasure in Heaven

March 9-10, 2019

Title: Treasure #1: Giving

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Text: Matthew 6:1-4

Giving to the Poor

Hidden Treasure:

The Jews of Jesus' time had a special term for giving to the poor and needy in their community. They called it "practicing righteousness." Here was an activity that in and of itself embodied the very goodness and justice of God Himself!

How important was it to practice righteousness? Well the rabbis taught that giving to the poor atoned for sin! It functioned, you might say, in the same way as the elaborate sacrifices offered in the great Temple in Jerusalem. Giving to the poor was in effect *giving a gift to God Himself!*

"You did it for me!"

How easy it is for us to get all caught up in issues of fairness or justice when it comes to helping the poor and needy in our midst. Jesus didn't bother to analyze the problem; He redefined it in terms of the very character of God. When you care for a brother or sister in need, you are giving a gift to God Himself!

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Matthew 25:34-40 NIV

³⁴"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

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³⁷"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

Giving to the Poor:

In God's economy – the economy of His Kingdom – caring for a person in need is all part of restoring God's world. It constitutes an act of righteousness. It is what real faith looks like:

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James 2:14-17 NIV

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Jesus went so far as to tell a young rich man that if he wanted to fulfill God's will, he would need to put this kind of faith into practice in his life:

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Matthew 19:21 NIV

²¹Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Audience of One

Not for show:

So how do we go about discovering this particular "hidden treasure"? In Matthew 6 Jesus gives us clear and simple instructions to assure that our

treasure hunt is successful. He begins by emphasizing just important it is that we never make a show of our generosity:

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Matthew 6:1-2 NIV

"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.

²"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."

To "practice your righteousness," as we have just seen, meant to give to the needy. Giving to the needy was something people knew they were supposed to do, and they found a way to let others know just how virtuous they were!

In fact, when people brought offerings to the Temple, they poured the coins into trumpet-shaped offering containers. Can you imagine the racket of coins rattling around inside a trumpet? And that was probably the point:

Righteousness Alert! Look over here: Somebody just scored huge points with the Almighty!

But Jesus says that the temporary public acclaim was all the treasure you would ever get from such a show.

Audience of One:

Instead, Jesus said that we are to focus on the only Person who matters at all: God Himself. He is our Audience of One:

Matthew 6:3-4 NIV

"But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

When we give "in secret" we allow God to receive the ultimate glory for the blessing. When we give "in secret" we allow God and God alone to be the Judge who bestows the reward to us. When we give "in secret," we act in faith that God is doing something much bigger than ourselves!

We are to perform for an Audience of One.

Treasure #1

The Gift of Giving:

Scientists have recently discovered what Jesus was talking about when He spoke of the reward of giving to a person in need. Researchers have found that when we give to someone else, our action activates the same part of the brain that makes us feel good when we receive a gift. The only difference: we feel even better after giving than we do from getting.

Anne Frank put it another way: "No one has ever become poor by giving."

Or as King David wrote:

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Psalm 37:25-26 NIV

I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.

They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be a blessing.

Treasure #1:

And so I encourage you to go look for hidden treasure: the Treasure of Heaven. Ask the Lord to show you how He wants to work through you to bless and restore His world by giving to someone in need. This is "secret agent" work for God's Kingdom. It is one of the most subversive things you can do to bring God's presence into a dark and selfish world.

I experienced this just the other day after skiing with my grandson. I got in line at the Mobil in Jeff to pay for a coffee and hot chocolate. But when I went to pay for my purchase the girl at the checkout said, "You're fine." I tried again, but to no avail. No explanation. Just two free beverages from the man in front of me. I turned to say thank you but he was long gone.

"Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing."

So who does God want you to bless?

