



**Red Letter City
Giving
June 19, 2016
Courage Church, Detroit, MI.**

Last week we completed Matthew chapter 5. I hope that you guys enjoyed that chapter... it was the most stretching set of scriptures I have ever studied and many of the topics turned out to be the most difficult I have taught on to date.

The tone definitely seems a change some as we enter into

this next section. The next three weeks deal with what should be considered three of the most common Christian practices,

but so often it is the simple things that we tend to neglect... or we tend to get wrong, and distort, and even *ruin*.

But these are good things.

So, basically, Jesus gives us everything that we get in Matthew chapter 5, telling us all these things that separate us from God... he shows us all these things that have no place in the Kingdom. All the things that will keep us running in circles but never finding what we are looking for.

He shows us, anger separates us from God. Lust separates us. Adultery separates us. Divorce separates us. Oaths separate us. Hatred and retaliation and treating enemies like they are our enemies...

those are all things that will get in the way of what life is supposed to be in the Kingdom of heaven.

But now he begins to talk about good things... and shows us how, even good things can be abused. And so He explains to us, that "if you do all

these good things, but you are doing them for yourself... you already have your reward... there is nothing to look forward to.”

So Jesus gives us these guidelines for how we do even *good things*.

The next three sections are about: giving, praying, and fasting.

But Jesus approaches these three from a very unique perspective.

All three times, he begins with the words “when you.”

He says, “when you do these *good things*... there are boundaries. There ARE RULES. There is a way to do it and be blessed, and there is another way to do it, and void yourself of any possible future blessing.”

So lets look at the good things.

Today we are going to look at Matthew Chapter 6:1-4 -

He starts off with a broad statement, that then gives three categories to it.

And that broad statement 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.”

Okay... The works of righteousness that he is about to address is giving, praying, and fasting... and here today we will focus on what he says about giving, and here it is:

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.

Lets Pray

The first series Dawn and I ever did here at Courage Church was a series called "Intentions."

We had just come off of eight straight years of ministry in the inner city... We did ministry in Los Angeles, and then we did it in New York City.

Because of where we lived in New York, we had a front row seat to Hurricane Sandy, one of the largest storms to ever hit the east coast, and because we were there when it happened it helped set our church up to respond in a huge way to meet the needs there.

We struggled to live in expensive cities on very small incomes. We had our first baby while living in LA and our next two were born in our apartments in New York City.

and we would constantly be fund raising, and trying to get people excited about what was happening in New York because we saw first hand how much of an impact it was making and we so badly wanted others to see that. and wanted them to get excited like we were excited, and wanted them to get on board like we were on board.

and we did that for 8 years... and after 8 years of that ministry, we felt like the Lord had released us, to move on.

only to accept this role, at a church in another inner city. We had been helping people and helping people and helping people...

and truthfully, we were kind of tired.

And one thing that happens when a person gets tired, is it begins to get easier and easier to forget why it is that you do what you do.

and so you find yourself going through the motions of what you have always known but it doesn't have the affect on you that it once had.

And something that for so long was motivated by love, sometimes finds itself being motivated by obligation, or by maintaining a reputation.

Or by pride.

So ultimately when we gave that first series we were preaching to ourselves and where we were in our hearts just as much as we were preaching to all of you..

Because if it happened to us, who live our whole lives for the ministry, it can happen to anyone.

We can find ourselves in routines that may be helpful, but are not healthy.

We can lend a hand because we know that it is what everyone else wants us to do... but our hearts are far far from it.

In fact, sometimes we can even give to someone or help someone because of the way that it makes US feel. Because we all need to feel good about ourselves sometimes.

And that is the underlying heart behind where Jesus goes in this next set of scriptures. It is the very important question of:

What is *driving* you?

Are you just as eager to help someone when you know that nobody will ever find out about it? Or is your ultimate goal to be seen by man and approved by man?

Everybody likes praise. They just do. They want people to congratulate them, and they want people to tell them how good they did.

So to us, this seems incredibly foreign, because naturally we want people to care about the things that we do. So it feels foreign, because it is.

What Jesus is talking about here is an entire new way of life. It is of becoming the type of person who loves people because of the way that love has wrapped up your heart and turned you into something new.

It has turned you into Someone who does things because Jesus is in you, not because it makes you feel good.

Someone who loves people because people need to be loved...

not because of the praise you may get from it or the people that you may impress because of it.

But most of us put more emphasis on what people think, than we do on what God thinks.

Jesus, in John 5:44 says:

“How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”

How can you even believe? Your whole worlds are wrapped up in each other and because of it, you are missing what God is doing right in your midst!

But what does it mean to seek the glory that comes from the only God?

It means that when we do the things that we do, we don't let our left hand know what our right hand is doing... Because when only God sees us then he approves us. and when only God approves us, we are approved by the only one that matters.

but ultimately, if we aren't careful... our world becomes about the show that we put on for our public instead of the way that we love our God.

and where I believe that God can use anything, and he can use you even when your motivations aren't in tact... if your life has been transformed then there eventually will be a progression... where the outpouring of our love for God *into* our world will become *natural*.

and I think that ultimately, that is what Jesus wants us to get out of what He says here.

That in the Kingdom of Heaven, you do the right things because they are natural. Not because you are working at them at all the time and trying convince yourself that it is what is best for you.

Because when you find yourself working to live up to a standard, you will eventually find yourself tired. And when you are tired, it is easier to forget.

and something that began as pure can become distorted, because there is now this reputation that you have to live up to, so you begin doing things that you don't even want to do in your heart, because **THAT IS THE ONLY WAY** to make everyone else think that you are okay.

and there is a word for that.

and it may surprise you as to what that word is... because it is far more subtle word than we typically give it credit for.

and it is the word "hypocrite."

This is the first time in the sermon that Jesus uses the word "hypocrite" - but it becomes an ongoing theme here moving forward.

So understanding the word hypocrite is rather important, because Jesus uses it enough times to make it pretty clear that hypocrisy is common among them, and it does not seem like a good thing.

Most of us, when we hear this word, we automatically see someone in our head. We see a person, or a group of people... And they stand for something, and speak up for something, but then they *do* something else.

That is how most of us define hypocrisy.

You say one thing. You do another.

A lot of people consider most Christians to be “hypocrites.”

It is one of the many labels that the world gives us.

Because they feel like we are always condemning other people for the same things that eventually it comes out that we are guilty of too. They see a guy on TV with fake hair condemning a sin, and a couple years down the road that same TV pastor is stepping down because he committed that sin.

And unfortunately for a lot of people, that is the extent of what a Christian is like.

That is the image.

That is the face that we have sold of Christianity.

And I think that Christians across America in the last ten or so years have been working tirelessly to change that image... to not try so hard to come across like they are perfect...

but for many who have **NOT** given the church a shot in the last ten years (and maybe even if they have), the only image that they have of us is *a bunch of sinners who think that we are perfect.*

But the **GOSPEL** says that we are a bunch of sinners who have been made righteous through Jesus.

Even the Apostle Paul constantly said “I always do what I do not want to do.”

He knew what was right and yet he often did something else. Does that make him a hypocrite?

No.

It doesn't.

It makes him a human.

Lets look at what a hypocrite actually is.

In the Greek, the word is essentially the same word as we get in English. It looks like this: "*hypokritēs*"

and what it means is "an actor or a stage player."

Which to most of us may come as a surprise. George Clooney is a hypocrite. Brad Pitt... total hypocrite.

The cast of "The Phantom of the Opera..." all hypocrites.
"The Newsies" - Hypocrites. Every last one of them.

In first century theater, there were typically only a couple of actors in each show, sometimes only one... and they had these masks that they would put over their faces that would signify the mood of a character.

If it were happy or sad or angry.

That was, sort of, the extent of theater in the early days.

Even then, there were theaters. In fact, what started as just a few boards been put together to build simple stages in open areas, eventually grew into massive arena-like theaters where Thousands of people would come and watch these shows.

About 5-600 years before Christ, there was a man named "Thespis" - He is the person that we get the word "Thespian" from.

Many people believe Thespis to be the first person to ever play a character on the stage rather than actually speaking as himself on the stage as others had previously done.

He was the first to stand on a stage and pretend to be something else.

And Thespis took a new form a theater known as "Greek Tragedy" and made it very popular... and in this type of theater, a lot of times one actor

would play many roles by using masks, with plots based mainly on ancient myths and the oral traditions.

it was purely for entertainment... but not everyone approved of it. For instance, there was a poet in that day named "Solon" and he is recorded as criticizing Thespis for "teaching people to love a lie."

His displeasure with theater was shared by many. So even as it grew more and more popular, it was not without controversy.

Because they were going to a show and seeing something that was not real. There was a natural discomfort with this new form of entertainment.

Because underneath that mask was a person who obviously felt differently than whatever the mask was conveying in that moment.

Imagine what Solon would say if he saw how far we have come with entertainment these days.

So this is the image that Jesus is giving us. He is not criticizing theater, he is just telling us that **we need not live there.**

So that is where he gets that word from, when he says hypocrite.

He uses it a whole bunch in Matthew 23 when he consistently associates the scribes and the Pharisees as "hypocrites," and he explains why he calls them this, in Matthew 23:5:

"They do all their deeds to be seen by others."

The whole problem was not that they said one thing and did another, which is what we typically would call "hypocrisy."

The problem was that their hearts did not line up with their actions.

When it came to the things that the Lord required of them... They acted.

Their lives weren't changed.

They just did things to look like their lives had changed.

They weren't at the core of who they are, generous people.

They were just willing to pay whatever amount it took to make people believe that they were generous people.

They didn't care about the poor.

They cared about looking like they cared about the poor.

Because when people think that you care about the poor, they think that you are good. They applaud you. They want to support you.

And so suddenly you could have this thing going, and it could seem really really great and it could seem like it is about all of these hurting people, when in reality, in your heart, the whole thing is about you.

Hypocrisy is far more than just duplicity. It is about the core of who you are lining up with the "you" that everyone else sees.

and he uses the word consistently throughout these next few sections.

but first he says:

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them."

And this is the first reference to theater we get... the phrase "in order to be seen by them" could also be interpreted "in order to be a public show for them."

So the whole thing is Jesus comparing the way we live, to the shows that people went to in that day, to watch people wear masks and play roles.

He says, don't be like the hypocrites in the Synagogues and in the streets... now obviously, there was not acting going on in the synagogues, at least not from a theatrical perspective, so what Jesus is doing here is he is saying that, when he looks at what people are doing with these works of

righteousness, to him, “it looks like theater.” It is not real. Its not the real them. They are doing it for all the wrong reasons.

Remember what we keep saying... Paul says it in Romans (2:16) - God judges the secrets of men.

He knows what is going on in the deepest places of our hearts, and he knows that it doesn't line up with the life you are projecting onto those around you.

What does the Lord say to Samuel? (1 Samuel 16:7) -

“man looks at the outside... but the Lord looks at the heart.”

The Lord looks at what is really going on in there... why are you doing what you are doing? Is it because people are watching? Or is it because there is a need? Is it because you want to be closer to God?

Or because you want people to *think* that you are closer to God?

And Jesus deals with all of that here. Giving. Praying. Fasting. the works of righteousness.

Today he talks about “giving.”

Twice here he says “when you give.”

Jesus is making a very bold assumption! These people are generous.

There is no “if” about it. You can't just not be generous. That would be an even bigger problem.

If your life is a constant flow of things all surrounding “you” where everything “you” accomplish is funneled back into “your needs” and you never get outside of yourself, then you are in big trouble.

There is nothing in the bible that Jesus talks about more harshly than a person so consumed with their own world that they ignore the tangible realities that they could make better that are right in front of them.

The heart of God is generosity. At the core of who Jesus is, is generosity. Someone willing to give his entire life for the sake of others.

At the heart of God's love, is generosity. For God so loved the world that he GAVE his only son to die for it.

And our lives should reflect that.

God says something powerful through the prophet Isaiah. It says this in Isaiah 57:15 -

“For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I live in a high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

You have probably heard pastors say things like this, and if you are like me, and you hear it at the wrong time it can feel a little cold and a little insensitive to where we are in life... but the thought is:

“if you are struggling with an area of your life... then you need to serve.”

When you are depressed.. serve others.

When you have a great need in your own life... meet someone else's need.

the idea, I at least thought, was that when you help others you begin to heal because it takes your mind off of your problems... or it at least shows you that your problems are small in comparison to others. and maybe somewhere in there God may show up and bless you for helping...

But I realized something not to long ago that I wish I would have known the first time I ever heard a pastor say that. Because I probably would have rolled my eyes a lot less all the times that I heard it.

See, this is the thing about the poor. and the afflicted. and the ones who are needy.

According to Isaiah (what we just read), God lives where *they are*.

He doesn't visit them in their affliction. He doesn't stop by for tea when their spirits are low. He lives in those places. It is his home. and so when you enter into those situations you are actually entering into the very place that God lives.

That is why we have been saying this whole series "Jesus lives in the broken places of our hearts." Because it is absolutely true.

So of course Jesus would expect that his followers would give. Of course he expects that they would put themselves in the types of environments that are *broken*, and of course they will do everything that they can to make life better for someone else, because for every moment that they give of themselves, they are basking in the presence of almighty God. They are entering into the place that he literally claims to live.

and that is enough to change a persons entire life.

When you get sick, where do you go? A doctors office. Possibly a hospital. Depending on your condition all you want is to go home... and be in YOUR BED.

But there are environments conducive to helping you heal... and when you need healing you seek out those places! That is where you want to be because that is where you are most likely going to get the most help!

And if you are yourself are hurting, or lost, or confused... when you serve others and get out of yourself, you are literally allowing yourself to heal, in the place that God lives.

There is no better environment.

Or what about this verse... Jeremiah 22:16 (NASB) says:

“He pled the cause of the afflicted and needy; Then it was well. Is not that what it means to know Me?” Declares the Lord.

What does it mean to know God?

We hear lots about this “relationship” with God that we all have... but if you aren’t doing *this*, then I dare say that you don’t have *that*. (you don’t know God)

You would probably say to me, “yeah, but the bible says all sorts of things about what it means to know God.”

and in response to that I would say “show me.” Show me another time when the bible actually defines what it means for a person to know God.

This is the only time that it describes what it is like to know God. In Jeremiah 9 it says “let NOT a rich man boast in his riches, but let him boast in this: that he KNOWS ME. and knows that I am I the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness.”

He says there: its important that you should boast only in the fact that you know him. And then he tells us ABOUT GOD. But he doesn’t give us any qualifications for what it means to know him.

Paul says in Philippians 3:10 “that I may know him, and the power of the resurrection.”

John in his first epistle (1 John 4:6-7) tells us that whoever knows God *listens* to us.

But what does it mean!?!?!?!?!?!?! It is only found in one place.

Lots of times throughout the bible it speaks of how essential it is to know God but only one place defines it. and that is Jeremiah 22:16.

You have to help people. You do. Jesus didn’t die so that we could join a country club and sit on our blessed assurance that we will one day make it into heaven. He came to establish a new Kingdom. And it is a relational

Kingdom, and it is an invasive Kingdom that invades brokenness and works for restoration and meets people where they are in the all the broken pieces of their lives and it helps them pick up the pieces.

And Jesus' hearers understood the need for generosity. They at least knew that they had to be generous... but for them, the part that they were missing was the "why." For them, it was visibility. It was an image they were creating, of something not all that reflective of what was in their hearts.

But it is incredibly powerful that Jesus tells these people that if that is the case: they have received their reward.

And here is the deal with receiving rewards.

Jesus tells us that our giving should be in secret, and if it is in secret, then God, who sees the things that happen in secret, will reward you.

But you only get one reward. and it is based on your intention behind what you are doing.

So you have to choose.

If the reason that you are giving is so that other people will see you give, then when other people see you give, you have achieved your goal.

and you have received your reward.

Your reward is the approval of a bunch of people whose opinions don't matter.

But because, for whatever reason, to you their opinions *did* matter, so you got it. You did your deed to be seen, you were seen, and now it is in the books. You will never be rewarded for that again.

I think a lot of us read this thinking that if we do something to be seen by others then we are going to get this awful reward and we are cutting ourselves off from Jesus or something. But it's so much more simple than

that. If you want others to cheer for you, when they cheer for you, you have achieved your goal.

God has this amazing way of giving us what we want... doesn't He?

Now, notice, Jesus does not say that you can't be seen. He just says, "Don't do it *in order to* be seen."

You can't always help if people see you and reward you for what you did... but you CAN help your motivation. and if your motivation is their approval then their approval shall be your reward.

But Jesus knows that God wants to do something a whole lot bigger in your life than that.

But he needs to know that you have a heart for people and not just for yourself.

Jesus takes them back. He says, "what is in your heart, matters." It is like what we said last week when we quoted the Apostle Paul: "Your love must be genuine."

and if you give to the poor because your love for the poor is genuine, then you are giving God something that he can really use... and something that he can really bless you for.

So Jesus says it this way:

"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."

Now, there is no evidence that there that anyone ever physically blew a trumpet when they gave.

the phrase "sound the trumpet" was a figure of speech for the way that people would slam their coins into the donation box.

This is what giving was like.

Here, we don't pass the buckets around when we take the offering. Instead, we just have these little boxes and they are made of wood and cloth and we keep them up here during worship and before and after service so you can just come up at any point and drop your tithe and offering in. They are subtle, if you drop the money in, there is no sound, there is nothing to really draw attention to what you are doing.

they had giving boxes in those days too... but they were brass receptacles that were small on top with a slot to put your money in, but were bigger on the bottom to hold the donation... it was small on top and had a huge brass bottom. And sometimes, people would come into the synagogues and they would slam their coins into the container so everyone there would hear and know how much money they were giving. That was called "sounding the trumpet"

It was a big sound. gold and silver coins smashing against a brass container. So people of course loved to give an offering, because it would instantly draw attention to themselves. Especially if the rooms were anything like the way our church is set up acoustically, that sound would resonate!

it was basically saying, "look at how much I am giving to the poor."

as they would drop coin after coin after coin.

Well Jesus was saying not to do that.

He is saying, "who cares who sees?" what are you doing it for? Because if your offering is about making an annoying sound in a brass jar to get people to look up and see who is giving so much, then you missed it. And you may get their praise, but when you lay your head down at night are you any better off?

Is your life any better having been told that you are great by another person who probably slams his coins in the brass jar the same way that you do?

Are you trying to show people how great you are?
Or are you trying to show people how great God is?

Because you... no matter how great the things that you have accomplished on this earth might be...

they will never save anyone.

The gospel is so much bigger than anything that you or I could possibly pull off, only Jesus could do that. And it made me remember something... its something that I forget so much in my human nature... who wants to know that I played a part in making the world a better place.

It made me remember that I am not going to change the world. But Jesus is.

and I think about the church here, and the responsibility of it all... and all of you amazing people who are a part of it. and for those of you who know me well, you know how much I care about this place, and you know how much this mission means to me and I know it means the same to many of you.

and I have shared with you before, but I always forget it... Because I put an awful lot of pressure on myself to see this thing work. To see peoples lives growing, to see our church growing... to making sure that we are making a difference.

and I get down on myself when it doesn't feel like it has gotten to where I THINK that i should be, and this week I was doing just that, and then the Lord just reminded me of something that my mentor once told me... "If you take all the guilt and blame when things aren't the way you think they should be... then you are going to take all of the credit when things do go the way that you think that they should, and grow."

and guys, the truth us, nobody can handle that kind of pressure for very long without bursting.

nobody can handle that much weight in their life. Nobody can handle guilt like that, and certainly nobody could handle pride like that.

I had to face the brutal reality that I am not here to change the city of Detroit.

Courage Church is not here to change the city of Detroit.

Courage Church is here to figure out how God is already moving toward changing the city of Detroit, and aligning ourselves up with that.

It is his master plan, and it is him who carries us, when we aren't reaching the potential that we think that we should be, and it is him who gets the credit when his kingdom moves forward in this place.

Jesus wants us to have a well rounded life that is not bogged down by pride or by guilt but by the understanding that He holds the whole world in his hands and he wants to use us, as his vessels, to change it.

and he wants to use you.

He is going to give your right hand opportunities to make huge impacts while he watches to see if your left hand gets wind of it.

He is going to give you enough to see, "is this getting to their heads?" Can they handle what I am going to do?

Because the type of blessing that God has in store for our lives is exceedingly abundantly beyond anything type of praise that we may get from someone else because we did our good deeds to be seen by them instead of by God.

This is an upside down Kingdom.

There is a moment in Matthew 25, and I have talked about it several times because in all of the bible I do not think that there is a more scary passage. I take every red letter seriously, but these are words that we all want to make sure we don't find ourselves on the wrong side of when we find ourselves face to face with our creator, and he separates the sheep from the goats.

And he puts the sheep on his right side.
And the goats on his left.

And he says to them opposite things... to those on his right he says: you fed me.

and those on his left, he says "you didn't feed me."

And we have talked a lot about the ones on his left. We have talked a lot about what happens when you ignore the poor... when you don't entertain the strangers, when you push away the aliens... when you take care of yourself but ignore the least of these. We have done that several times.

But for today I want to focus on the ones who are on his right.

Because Jesus tells those on his right:

come in.

Because I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. Naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me.

and do you know how the ones, whom the red letters describe as "righteous," will respond to Jesus?

These the ones who did good... who got it! the ones who Jesus was pleased with...

They are going to be, almost confused.

They are going to say to Jesus, "I did that?"

it was like, in that moment, they didn't even know.

They had helped all of these people and it had become such a natural part of their lives that they didn't even realize they were doing it anymore.

They didn't let their left hand know what their right hand had done.

They didn't weigh every option before they helped someone. They didn't look around to see who was watching. They didn't make sure that a scribe was right there ready to document their good deed so that they could go down in history as someone who was generous.

They didn't go home, proud of what they had done... feeling assured that they had earned their place in heaven.

No.

They didn't know. They went home like they went home every other day.

They answered Jesus....

When?

When did we do that? We can't even remember.

and I think that that is the goal. Generosity will find you lined up with the heart of God because everything about God revolves around generosity. And when we can get to a place where that giving becomes so engrained in our hearts that we do it without even noticing it... without thinking about what is in for us...

or even about "how will this come back on us?"

or "how will this make me look?"

or EVEN "how will this make me FEEL?"

I think when we get to that place, then Jesus says "you have my heart."

The people that I know that are the most generous... they hate it when there are trumpets. They hate it when people make a public deal about it. It makes them feel awkward.

Because they weren't giving, to get.

They weren't giving to get more back, or to get recognition... they were giving because there was a need, and they had what it took to meet that need. and they have learned that the best way to live is with your hands open toward others....

inviting. giving. feeding. visiting. loving.

The heart of the entire gospel is the story of a God who gave.

But he didn't give to get.

Jesus gave his entire life for us so that we could share eternity with him. So that we could see the Kingdom of Heaven...

He just gave.

And the bible tells us that *that* is what love looks like.
Paul tells us, make sure your love is genuine.

You give because you love. Not because of what it will return to you.