

## The Hand of the Lord Who Freely Gives

March 5, 2025

**Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21** Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. <sup>2</sup> "Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. <sup>3</sup> "But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> "that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. <sup>5</sup> "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. <sup>6</sup> "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. <sup>16</sup> "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. <sup>17</sup> "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> "so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. <sup>19</sup> "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup> "but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

"Please, Sir, I want some more"

In Charles Dickens famous novel *Oliver Twist*, Oliver approaches the master with an empty bowl and a request for more food. The master "gazed in stupefied astonishment on the small rebel for some seconds and then clung for support to the copper. The assistants were paralyzed with wonder; the boys with fear." No one could believe that Oliver would dare ask for more.

Our Lenten series this year is "The Hand of the Lord." The Hand of the Lord reaches down from heaven to bless us and fill our lives with every good thing, both spiritually and physically.

We must come like Oliver with empty bowls before the Lord. If our bowls are already filled, how can they be filled with the blessings of our Lord. The difference of course is that our master does not respond with astonishment at our request but joyfully fills our bowls with his blessings.

In our text this evening Jesus discusses three things that his disciples should do with their hands, giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting. Jesus doesn't discuss or try to convince us that we should be doing these things. He takes it for granted that his disciples are doing these things. His concern rather is the attitude behind the actions. He stresses that they ought to be done purely because they are things we should be doing, and not out of a desire to gain some reward.

If we fill our hands with the praise of men, there is no room for the blessing of God. Similarly, if we approach God with our hands full of what we think are our good works, again there is no room for God's blessings. Rather when we do these things we should neither seek the praise of men nor think that we

deserve a reward. Instead, we should come before God with empty hands seeking his blessings for the sake of Jesus Christ.

**Nothing in my hands I bring, only to thy cross I cling.**

Our text is part of the famous sermon on the mount. Jesus begins that sermon one chapter earlier in Matthew 5:3 with the opening statement. **Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** The entire sermon on the mount hangs on this very first statement by Jesus.

**"Blessed are the poor in spirit,"** that is those who come to Jesus with empty hands. Jesus isn't concerned with how little or how many earthly goods you have. He is concerned with the attitude of your heart. All people are poor in spirit. Without Christ we have nothing. Most people don't realize, understand or even really care about this truth. It is those who recognize their spiritual poverty and who come to Jesus confessing their spiritual poverty whom Jesus calls blessed. To them Jesus gives the riches of the kingdom not as payment but as a free gift. Those who come with empty hands to Christ receive from God's hand the blessings of heaven.

This truth is the backbone of the sermon on the mount. It is those who come with empty hands who receive the blessing of the Lord.

In our text tonight Jesus says, **"They have received their reward."** The Greek phrase here is one that is used in business dealings. It means to receive payment in full. The receipt has been given and signed. The payment is complete. Nothing more is owed to you. If you do these things so that others will think well of you, that is your full payment.

Jesus goes on to say, **"do not let your left hand know what your right is doing."** This is obviously impossible. Jesus is clearly being hyperbolic here. The point he is trying to get across is that we should not even think about it ourselves. Once you have done it forget that you have done it. Don't do it for the praise of other men but also don't do it to praise yourself or to make yourself feel good. The only reason to give to the poor is out of love for them and God. Any other motivation is sinful. Jesus repeats this same lesson for all three actions, giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting.

Jesus applies this principle to these three actions, but we could extend it to every action we under take. What is our motivation? Is my goal in preaching to receive praise from you? Is your goal in farming, parenting, teaching or any work you have to do to receive praise or to accrue the wealth of this world? Rather whatever you must do, do it with your whole heart, seeking no reward, because you know that the hand of the Lord has already blessed you with all good things through the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Colossians 3:23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,**

This of course doesn't mean that you shouldn't sell your crops for money, or that you shouldn't get paid for the work that you do. It simply speaks about your motivation for doing a good job at your work.

We come now to the reward that Jesus speaks of.

Jesus says, **"your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly." Matthew 6:4**

In our sinfulness we often read something into the text that is not here. We often read this verse as though Jesus says, "because you did these things in secret your Father will reward you." But in these verses God does not speak about the reason for God's reward, he only reassures us that God's hand will open in blessing. We have to go back to the very first thing that Jesus said in the sermon on the mount. **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God."**

When we come to God with empty hands, the hand of God's blessings fills us with the riches of his kingdom. If we come already filled with the praises of men, where is there room for God's blessings? If we come with hands full of our own good deeds, look what I have done, where is there room for God's blessings? The hand of God will and has already reached down from heaven to bless you abundantly through Jesus Christ your Lord. Therefore, empty your hands of all earthly praise, and any thought of good works and stretch them out to receive the fullness of his blessings.

2 Kings chapter four tells the story of a widow who asks Elisha the prophet for help. Her husband is dead, and she has nothing with which to provide for herself and her two sons. Elisha tells her to go and borrow every jar or container she can find from her neighbors. When she has gathered all of these containers she is to begin pouring oil into them. She does this and the oil never stops running from her one small oil jar until all the containers she gathered are full. Remember that at that time oil was very costly.

How many containers would you gather, and would you not make certain that they were all empty?

Through Jesus Christ your savior the hand of the Lord has come down from heaven to fill you with every good thing. Come to the Lord with an empty heart and empty hands, so that you may be filled with his goodness. Come to the Lord's Supper that you are about to receive with contrite and empty heart, because to you is given the kingdom of heaven. Do not fill your heart with the treasures of this life. How then would you receive the treasures of God's kingdom? Empty your hearts that God may fill them.

**Joel 2:12-13 "Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm.**

Today is Ash Wednesday and the words that are typically said as the ashes are applied are this, **"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."** As dust you have nothing to bring to God. God who is rich in mercy desires to fill you with his blessings. Come with empty hearts to be filled with the blessings of the Lord.

**Nothing in my hand I bring, only to thy cross I cling. Amen**