

Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 6 1-4

Do Good to Please God

6 “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. **2** 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. **3** But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

Matthew 5 focused on inner transformation:

- anger
- lust
- retaliation
- hatred
- love of enemies

Matthew 6 shifts to motivation and visibility:

- Why do you do good?
- Who is your audience?
- Are you serving God or feeding identity?

This is not accidental. It’s surgical.

Matthew 6 is where Jesus:

- Dismantles performative righteousness
- Removes the ego refuge people retreat to after moral teaching
- Exposes how even “good” behavior can become self-serving

It’s also where:

The audience can no longer argue morally —
because the issue becomes the heart, not the rule.

The Core Claim Jesus Is Making

Righteousness can be corrupted even when the action itself is good.
Jesus is not criticizing:

- Giving
- Charity
- Generosity
- Obedience

He is exposing why those things are done.

This is important:

He assumes his listeners will give to the needy.

The issue is not whether you give — but who gets paid when you do.

In Jesus' time, a charitable deed (Greek: *eleēmosynē*) meant direct, material aid to the poor — not general “good works,” volunteering, or moral behavior.

It was hands-on mercy, not abstract kindness.

What counted as charity in the 1st-century Jewish world

1. Almsgiving (the primary meaning)

This is the big one.

- Giving money, food, or goods
- Directly to:
 - Widows
 - Orphans
 - The disabled
 - The sick
 - The landless poor
- Often done daily, not occasionally

This was not optional generosity.

It was seen as covenant faithfulness.

What did NOT count as charity (important)

In Jesus' day, charity did not mean:

- Teaching publicly
- Praying eloquently
- Fasting visibly
- Being morally upright
- Correct theology
- Public piety

Those things were religious acts — almsgiving was mercy in action.

That's why Jesus chooses this example first in Matthew 6.

Why this mattered so much socially

Charity in that culture:

- Created social hierarchy
- Established honor
- Built reputation
- Generated public obligation from the recipient

A giver could easily become:

- A benefactor
- A moral superior
- A quiet controller of others

So Jesus steps in and says, essentially:

“Do not turn mercy into leverage.”

“To Be Seen” — What That Actually Means

This isn't just about applause or praise.

“To be seen” means:

- To secure identity
- To establish moral superiority
- To confirm worth
- To protect ego
- To control how others perceive you

In modern terms:

Using righteousness as currency.

Jesus is dismantling the economy of:

“I am good because others see that I am good.”

Why “to be seen” was especially dangerous here

Because almsgiving:

- Happened at synagogue collections
- Happened at city gates
- Happened in marketplaces
- Happened where beggars gathered

It was public by default.

So Jesus is not naïve — He knows people will see.

What He forbids is:

- Intentional display
- Internal scorekeeping
- Identity-building through generosity

Hypocrisy (What Jesus Is Really Calling Out)

The Greek idea behind “hypocrite” is an actor on a stage.

So hypocrisy here is not:

- Doing bad things secretly
- Failing morally

It is:

Doing good things for the sake of the audience.

That’s why Jesus says they “have received their reward already.”

The reward wasn’t God.

The reward was attention.

“Left Hand / Right Hand” — This Is the Knife Twist

This line is often softened, but it shouldn’t be.

Jesus is not just saying:

“Don’t brag.”

He is saying:

Don’t even internally curate your righteousness.

In other words:

- Don’t replay it
- Don’t store it
- Don’t build a self-image around it
- Don’t let your ego audit your generosity

This goes deeper than secrecy from others.

It is secrecy from the self.

That’s radical.

First: what Jesus is not saying

He is not saying:

- Forget your actions literally
- Suppress memory
- Become unaware
- Practice dissociation

This is not about amnesia or self-denial.

It is about how the self organizes meaning around action.

The psychological model Jesus assumes

Jesus is assuming a divided inner life — something modern psychology fully agrees with.

- One part of the self acts
- Another part of the self narrates
- Another part evaluates
- Another part stores identity

In modern terms:

- Behavior system
- Ego / self-concept
- Memory + narrative construction

Jesus is targeting the narrator.

“Right hand” — the acting self

The right hand represents:

- The part of you that does
- The immediate, embodied response
- Compassion in motion
- Action without self-reference

This is pre-reflective action — helping because help is needed.

“Left hand” — the auditing self

The left hand represents:

- The observing ego
- The internal witness
- The part that keeps score
- The identity-builder

This is the part that asks:

- “What does this say about me?”
- “Will this be remembered?”
- “Does this confirm my goodness?”

This is not evil — but it is dangerous when fed by mercy.

Why this is so radical

Most moral systems depend on self-reward:

- “I am good because I do good.”
- “I deserve because I helped.”

Jesus cuts that loop.

He wants:

- Secure identity before action
- Not identity constructed by action

The danger Jesus is preventing

When the left hand knows:

- The deed becomes capital
- Capital becomes entitlement
- Entitlement becomes control
- Control becomes abuse

This is how spiritual harm begins — quietly.

Why secrecy from self matters more than secrecy from others

You can help in secret and still:

- Replay it
- Savor it
- Use it internally
- Compare yourself to others

Jesus knew the most dangerous audience for our good deeds isn't other people — it's our own ego

You are no longer dependent on moral performance

When you don't self-reward:

- Your worth is not tied to your usefulness
- Your identity is not propped up by helping
- Your goodness doesn't need proof

This creates inner stability.

You don't need:

- To be seen
- To be thanked
- To be remembered
- To be superior

That's a form of rest most people never experience.

Compassion becomes clean

You are protected from resentment and burnout

You gain psychological integrity (wholeness)

You experience being seen without self-display

You no longer need suffering to feel meaningful

This is subtle but crucial.

If your identity is built on helping:

- You unconsciously need others to remain broken
- You may resist their independence
- You may over-insert yourself

When you don't self-reward:

- You can help and let go
- You can heal and move on
- You don't need to be needed

That's ethical maturity.

Why This Protects People from Spiritual Abuse

This teaching:

- Removes moral leverage
- Prevents hierarchy
- Stops leaders from weaponizing generosity
- Breaks the link between giving and control

If righteousness must be hidden:

- It can't be used to shame others
- It can't be used to demand loyalty
- It can't be used to claim authority

This is anti-cult, anti-performance, anti-spiritual ego teaching.

Quietly revolutionary.

that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you [a]openly.

First: what "open reward" means in Jesus' framework

An open reward is not:

- A trophy
- Public praise from God
- Proof of moral superiority
- A guarantee of comfort or success

It is something others can see, life can feel, or reality responds to — without you orchestrating it.

Inner peace and unshakeable steadiness

Clarity and wisdom in decision-making
Trust from others (without manipulation)
Freedom from anxiety and compulsive striving
Restoration of relationships
Fruitfulness that outlasts you
Authority without force

Provision — but not indulgence

Jesus promises provision:

- Daily bread
- What is needed, not what feeds ego
- Sufficiency without excess obsession

Open rewards are not guarantees of ease.

Jesus himself had:

- Open authority
- Open wisdom
- Open favor

And still:

- Suffered
- Was misunderstood
- Was rejected

So open reward \neq worldly success.

God's open rewards aren't prizes for being good — they're the natural fruit of living in alignment with truth.