

### **Matthew 4:23-Matthew 6:1-4**

In the last several weeks, we have covered a lot of ground. Jesus, up to this point in the Sermon on the Mount, has made it clear that his Kingdom invitation extends to anyone who will follow, regardless of his or her resume or track record. He immediately began illustrating the contrasting Kingdom life by speaking to the low boil of contempt that we carry toward others and how it's not dissimilar from murder in terms of what's going on within the heart. He has spoken to our dealings with each other, especially men toward women, in ways that objectify and dehumanize, rather than lifting each other up as highly regarded objects of love. He has talked about the importance of integrity and doing what you say, rather than only doing what you *really* promise. He has challenged us with words regarding the love that we give and who we give it to, explaining that in the Kingdom, love is even given to our enemies, rather than only those that love us back. So much so that followers of Christ would offer up another cheek, further inconvenience his or her self, or more, to ensure that evil was confronted with good and that forgiveness would prove itself more powerful than revenge. And we have heard Jesus explain that trying to get people to admire and appreciate who you are is a tiring work that makes your own performance the point, rather than Christ's love.

The question today about all this has to do with what we'll do with it.

### **Will you allow the teachings of Jesus to become more than information?**

The spirit of Christ is at work within each of us, and within our community as a whole. Certainly the information is important; but if we refuse to make what we know real- if we deny the information's power by not allowing his Spirit to enact it all in our behaviors, habits, disciplines, prayer and all around transformation of life, we reduce Jesus' words to something historical. Something pretty, but not revolutionary as intended.

Spend a few moments reading the text noted above, and ask God to reveal what he wants to do in and through you this week. Invite him to wake you up to something new and powerful this week based on his will not only for you, but his will for people and they interact and what they become, in his Kingdom. Refuse to head into this week trying to merely arm yourself with more head-knowledge. Dare to let the Spirit of Christ bring revolution.

# week five

**Tuesday**

My wife is amazing. She has a tremendous servant's heart and does so many incredible things—especially around our home—that she doesn't get enough recognition for. Frankly, I still struggle with taking too much of all she does for granted.

One of the ways my wife feels most loved is when I do various chores around the house without her asking. I've always been willing to tackle projects when asked, but I haven't always been that great at taking the initiative to seek out things that need to be done. So, I've steadily tried to improve on that through the years.

However, as I began to try to take more initiative and tackle more chores unprompted, what I discovered is that it became very important to me that my wife noticed. And not just noticed, but I wanted her to do cartwheels, nominate me for husband of the year, and gush with gratitude. And if I didn't get that, I felt like I was getting robbed of what I deserved.

Suddenly, I found myself in this same company:

**“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 men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”** (Matthew 6:2)

And while I didn't use trumpets, I wasn't above rattling the dishwasher door a lot louder than necessary to try to make sure she heard what I was doing or casually 'forgetting' to put the Pledge can and dusting rag back in the closet before she returned home. I wanted noticed. And if I didn't get it, frustration would build. “How ungrateful can she be? Doesn't she realize how I'm going out of my way to do things I don't like to show her that I love her?”

However, one day something clicked. I rarely, if ever, say thank you to my wife for the exponentially more often she does the laundry, makes dinner, cleans, etc. And I bet she doesn't really like doing it either. But she does it. Daily. Without manipulating me to shower her with praise.

This wasn't about what my wife did or didn't notice. This was about my heart and the warped sense of entitlement it had slipped into—a heart very unlike Jesus. That awareness was humbling, but also motivating to let God begin to shape a new heart in me if I really wanted to love as He loves.

So, pay attention throughout your day today and ask, *am I doing something simply to be noticed? To be thanked later on? Am I finding myself frustrated if I'm not noticed?* If so, may encourage you to simply repeat this simple prayer throughout the day, “God, show me the areas of my life where I desperately want to be noticed. And as you do, teach me to love as you love”

**“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** (Mat 20:26-28)

*God, help me to serve and give and do right out of true love of you and others, not selfishness or an addiction to praise and approval for myself. Help me to understand that your Kingdom isn't a show, but the total transformation of selfish hearts. Help me move through my day with the quiet, anonymous confidence of Christ. Amen.*

Jonathan Bow, Lead Pastor

# week five

**Wednesday**

**"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven."** (Matthew 6:1 NASB)

Think about this: whatever you do as a discipline now will be a fundamental part of who you are in 3 or 4 years.

What if you currently give and do things with a strong, even manipulative desire for reward and acknowledgement? In 3 or 4 years, you will not give or do things (or if you do, it will be under grumpy compulsion) unless you're sure it will come back around to benefit you somehow.

What if currently only give yourself to things that are fun and that produce gratifying feelings? In 3 or 4 years, you will refuse to do anything uncomfortable or inconvenient because you will have determined somewhere in your mind that *that's just not who I am*.

*What if you train yourself for years to only do what brings immediate reward and applause? How then can you love people the way of Christ, since you have taught yourself only to love when you know some sort of love and approval will come back your way?*

It even works in reverse: What if you routinely immerse yourself in bad habits, darkness-reinforcing ideas and paradigms, daily or weekly, justifying them somehow along the way? In 3 or 4 years, that habit will be more and more a part of who you are, fundamentally. It will have grown like ivy into your heart.

Good or bad, whatever we do as a discipline, or routine, now, will be who we are in a very short time. And it's harder to change hearts than routines.

Perhaps Jesus' words in Matthew 6 work on two fronts. As always, he is very much interested in people. So, he wants our "righteousness" (which isn't a hyper-holiness, but an act of aligning ourselves with the others-centeredness of Christ) to not be a self-serving spectacle but something that makes the other person the point. This is love. Secondly, Christ knows our hearts, and knows that if we don't train ourselves to stay out of the limelight, we'll become the kind of people that do everything with what-about-me agenda running in the background. We'll hate following Christ because we hate not ever getting the accolades we've trained our hearts to demand. Christ knows that if we don't learn this now, we'll have the much harder work of unlearning it later.

Join God in evaluating your heart today, and for days to come, by praying the following passage that Paul wrote to the church in Philippi:

**"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross."** (Philippians 2:3-8 NIV)

Steve Daugherty, Teaching Pastor

**Matt 6:1-4**

Today. Right now. This moment. You are completely and perfectly loved by God.

Believe in it. Rest in it.

Don't perform your spirituality for others in order to try to get the fulfillment that can only come from the Father.

Below are the lyrics to a song we did this past Sunday. Read through it, taking it in as if your loving Father was singing it over you.

Because I Told You So  
by Jonatha Brooke

**If I gave you the sky  
If I laid down my life  
Would you believe me then?**

**If I promised to change  
If I carried the blame  
Would you believe me then?**

**Could you see it like me?  
And believe what I see?  
Could you listen and remember  
That I love you?  
Only because I told you  
Because I told you so**

**If you told me you lied  
But I stayed true and tried  
Would you believe me then?**

**If your beauty was gone  
But my love lingered on  
Would you believe me then?**

**Could you see it like me?  
And believe what I see?  
Could you listen and remember  
That I love you?  
Only because I told you  
Because I told you so  
You take the wheel for now  
I'm too tired to drive this one  
home  
Anyhow  
For now**

**When you mention my name  
Let this one thing remain  
My love  
Believe me now**

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*“God, if you truly love me this way, then I have no performance to make for others. I am free to rest in how you see me, free to journey into all you have for me to do and become. Help me to embrace the peace that comes with knowing deeply that you love me and that your love shapes who I am. Amen.”*

Stephen Claybrook, Worship Pastor

**“Don’t let your right hand know what your left hand is doing.”**

Think of the people that you work with. Think of the members of your own household. Think of the people, acquaintances and strangers that your day and weekend will overlap. How can you, in small ways, secretly improve their day?

Yes...it probably does seem like a juvenile novelty. *Why not do it anyway?*

Who can you secretly buy breakfast or lunch? Can you stealthily have lunch show up at the office for your co-workers? Who are 4 or 5 people that can you send a note of kindness and appreciation to? Who can you anonymously brag on to your boss? Can you pass on a good lead to one of your associates? Can you purchase someone’s fuel secretly? Maybe you can find a way that improves someone’s situation secretly, without any personal benefit, and just enjoy being part of the God’s “others-first” Kingdom. If you enjoy it- that’s fine. Righteousness should be enjoyable. If you find yourself trying to find a way to help someone solve the case to discover it was you, ask God to help you with this habit of needing credit.

Perhaps there are things you can do that others will in fact know who it is, but you can practice doing it in such a way so as to not need credit or ever use it as the reason good things *should* come back to you. Perhaps you can make coffee or breakfast for your spouse before going to work, as a new habit. Perhaps you can do your roommate’s laundry. Maybe you can buy gift-cards to restaurants to keep with you, so you can give them to people in need or the homeless since handing them cash has always bothered you. Maybe you mow your neighbor’s lawn while their away (careful with this one...they may be a stickler for perfection...). Maybe you, or even you and your family, can make a habit out of bringing supplies and/or food (or even just your presence) to someone in need every week.

Be creative, but do it in a spirit of a *non-event*. It’s just a way of quietly advancing the Kingdom of God, making sure our own kingdom doesn’t get the credit. Then enjoy the peace that comes from knowing that your heart is learning to become like Christ’s.