



**WHAT DOES JESUS SAY
ABOUT POSING?**

EXPLORING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Series: What Does Jesus Say About _____?

Title: What Does Jesus Say About Posing?

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(Just before message there is a song: My Redeemer Lives.)

Looking forward to next few weeks...

In August and early in September, we going through a series of messages that grew out of something Jesus said in Matthew chapter 5, you may recall us reading this verse:

Matthew 5:14, 16 (NIV84)
“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden... In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

We have talked a good deal about what it means to be the light of the world.

As we were looking forward beyond our reflections on those verses in Matthew 5, and at points different parts of Matthew 5, we decided that it would be a good thing for us not to rush away too quickly from chapters 6 and 7.

If you're not familiar with the Gospel of Matthew, you might not know that Matthew 5, 6 and 7 are known more popularly as 'The Sermon on the Mount', one of the longest collections of uninterrupted teaching of Jesus to be found in the Bible.

As followers of Jesus, it is important for us to come back to the gospels and Jesus' teaching not only because it is practical, powerful and wise. It is important to come back to it, because Jesus' words remind us who Jesus is and reveal God to us. So over the next while, we will be lingering in Matthew 6 and 7, taking it piece by piece to hear, "What Jesus Says About _____? (Different things that relate to our lives today)

Be Careful...

Right after teaching all of this Jesus says, “Be careful.”

Matthew 6:1 (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.”

Jesus opens the next section of the sermon on the mount with a warning. He says **Be Careful, Beware**.

It is like he is putting up a big caution sign, that we don't do our 'righteousness' (or as some translations say, “good deeds”) before others to be seen by them.

WAIT A MINUTE!! DIDN'T JESUS JUST TELL US IN CHAPTER 5 TO “LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE BEFORE MEN, THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD DEEDS AND PRAISE YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN.” (MT. 5:16)

This is one of those moments where one could claim it is a bit confusing. Jesus wants us to let our light shine, but if we are doing our 'righteousness' in front of others we can have God end being unimpressed? How are we going to untangle this mess?

Jesus' Three Examples

To illustrate his point, Jesus took three of the foundational practices that a devout Jew in his day to show what he was talking about.

Giving to the Poor

Matthew 6:2–4 (NIV)

“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.

We are to be a generous people. God calls us to be especially generous towards those who are without, those who are in need. This was true in Jesus' day as well as in our own.

There were some people in Jesus' day who in their attempt to 'glorify God' did their best to draw attention to their giving. "Look at me, look at me! Bring over the photographer from the newspaper, put a plaque on this wall, I am doing something significant that God commands."

They had a desire to have others applaud them, and approve of them.

BEFORE WE POINT AN ACCUSING FINGER AT 'THE HYPOCRITES' WE NEED TO REMEMBER WE HAVE THE SAME STRUGGLES.

For better or worse we are largely **approval magnets**. We gravitate to where we can find approval. Starting with kids. I have four kids, and one of the commonest things I can hear when one of the accomplishes something, from peeing on the toilet to singing in a concert is "Dad, come see!"

In adolescence, we look for approval, and if we don't find it in one crowd, we can move to another. And quite frankly when we get older, we think we outgrow this, but we just do it in more sophisticated ways. (have you seen anyone in a powder blue polyester suit lately? Probably because we all agree they should be left in the past.

Our desire for approval, I would say, is not good or bad, it just is. We are designed by God for community and connection, and our desire for approval is connected to our desire for connection.

Back to Giving to the Poor...

Jesus says the kind of giving that draws attention to itself is not what God is looking for. Care for the poor is a way of showing them that they are valued, and showing God that we value the people he values. If we are not careful though, we can end up trying to do the right thing in a way that twists its intention and exalts ourselves in the eyes of others.

Our desire for approval presents a danger

When we look for the approval of others, what happens when they don't approve of what God asks of us. Will we follow our heavenly Father, or follow their nodding heads?

Transforming Action: Jesus gives us something to do

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, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Knowing that this is a struggle for us, and knowing as followers of Jesus we ultimately want God's approval, Jesus doesn't just say go figure it out, he gives us practical advice that can break our 'approval addiction' in the eyes of other people.

Give in secret. Don't talk about it, don't do it publically. Just do it quietly.

When we are giving without attention, God is paying attention.

Where we look for approval, determines our reward.

Similarly with Prayer

Matthew 6:5-6 (NIV)

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Jesus then turns to the practice of prayer. Prayer is about our communication and our relationship with God.

There were those in Jesus' day (as in our own) that saw prayer time as an opportunity to advertise their spirituality.

*Have you ever been in a restaurant when an exuberant Christian tried to get the whole place to be quiet so he/she could say grace?
If I'm reading this right, Jesus says that's not what God's after.*

The attitude of 'we showed them what we're all about,' when we purposely put our 'holiness before others' earns us only the reward of the approval of those like us.

Maybe we don't stop restaurants, but have you heard someone tell us about how amazing their prayer life is, but not with an attitude that is trying to encourage us in our own, but rather one that seems to seek our approval of their spirituality?

Matthew 6:6 (NIV)

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you

ACTIONS TAKEN IN SECRET BREAK THE BONDAGE OF APPROVAL ADDICTION

Jesus on the other hand, did the opposite. There were times he prayed with his disciples, but when he wanted to work on his relationship with God, he got away.

Matthew 14:23 (NIV)

After he had dismissed them [the crowds & his disciples], he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.

Jesus doesn't want us to try to impress others with our prayer life, he wants us to meet with God and pray.

As we begin to meet with God in prayer, we don't need to impress others, we lean into God in prayer.

Fasting

Matthew 6:16–18 (NIV)

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

“You don’t need to worry about this one pastor, I never fast.”

Of the disciplines on the list, I suspect for most of us, fasting is one that we practice the least. Reading the passage, I was reminded that fasting has not been a very active part of my life lately, and got me thinking.

This morning’s message is not a complete explanation of fasting.¹

Fasting is about humbling ourselves before God, demonstrating our dependence upon him alone, our desire to please him above even our appetite for food.

I think Jesus chose fasting for last because of how opposite the attitudes are here. Yet then, and now, there are times that some fast putting on the down face, looking for someone to shower pity, and in turn approval on their spirituality.

“Oh, it’s rough, but I just want to honour God.”

Jesus says, if attention is what you want, just take out your phone, snap a pic, add a faded filter, #fasting and get it out there on social media.

Your reward will be the ‘Likes’ and ‘retweets’, nothing more.

But if you want God’s attention, he says the equivalent of ‘take a shower’ comb your hair, put on your make-up and get don’t show off.

¹ There are a couple sermons on our website you can listen to or download notes for that could help you if you want to know more about fasting:

<http://ssc.church/sermons/the-no-that-gives-your-faith-a-yes/> ,
<http://ssc.church/slow-down-fast/>

What would happen if this was...

Good News on Three Fronts

- **We could be freer the bondage of people's expectations.**
 - As long as we are alive we will be looking for connection to people, but as we turn to God we can be free of trying to follow the crowd.
- **God is a good father that wants to reward and help us**
 - We don't earn God's approval, or his favour. He wants to help us.

We answer the question about being the light of the world

- **If we are seeking to honour God in secret, he will reward us, and he will make our light shine.**
- It is better to be caught doing good, than trying to advertise it
 - If we give to the poor and needs God cares about, the effects and relationships will be our witness
 - If we pray in secret, there will be times to pray together (you can tell when you are around a praying person)
 - If we fast, our dependence and humility will show up in other areas of life.
 - We can be the light of the world

Closing Prayer

- Whose approval am I looking for? (think back on your week)
 - God help me to be generous for you
 - God help me to pray, to be with you
 - God help me to humble myself, recognize my weakness (maybe even by giving up something, even food for a time) before you.

Circle Group Questions

- **Is there some person's approval that you are trying to get?**
- **How could you take an action to look to God instead?**
- **Is there a practice on the list you find challenging? Why?**