

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 (ESV)

The Father Who Sees

By definition, a reward is earned. At the end of any sports season, the final team standing feels a great sense of accomplishment because they've earned their reward. When you've studied your butt off for an exam and you get a passing grade – you've received a reward you earned. When you work hard for that promotion at work and you finally get it, you receive the reward for all that work. When you finally get to retirement age, you've earned a reward for many years on the job.

We live in a society that makes you earn it. You got to work for it. In society that may work, but in the kingdom of God, not so much. See, it's hard to lay down our self-righteousness in a "you deserve it society." You deserve that promotion man; you worked your tail off for it. All these rewards can be good, but are they ultimate? Are they eternal? Are the rewards you're seeking in life about yourself and the applause of man or are they eternal?

Beware (v. 1)

The gospel isn't anti-effort. It's anti-earning. We're not trying to earn God's favor through things like giving, prayer, and fasting. However, the Lord does give us the gift of effort and trying to pursue sweet communion with Him. But in that effort, we must beware that we're not practicing our own self-righteousness but living in complete dependence on His righteousness. Dependence and living in His power are the key.

Invitation 1: Give in His power. (v. 2-4)

If our eyes are fixed on Jesus, we will see ourselves as needy. Then, in humility, we see giving to the needy as an overflow of our abiding relationship with Jesus. He's been so generous toward me; how could I not be generous toward others?

Invitation 2: Pray in His power. (v. 5-6)

When you pray, seek the Father's heart – not the approval of men. Pray from a heart of humility and dependence. What reward are you seeking when you pray – is it temporal or eternal?

Invitation 3: Fast in His power. (v. 16-18)

We neglect this habit because we only see it through a temporal lens. We only see it as not getting to eat. We only see it in the negative. But let me encourage you to see it through an eternal lens. This is an active pursuit of killing the desires of our flesh. And just as important, this is an invitation to sweet communion with the Father. It's not only abstaining from food. It's about receiving God's grace. It's not just an emptying but a filling. Give me more of that!

We all desire to be seen and known. The applause of man seems enticing because it makes us feel seen and known. Ultimately that is what Jesus promises us, though. The question is do we really believe that our Father who sees in secret is enough? Is the reward that our Father gives enough for you, or do you need the applause of man?

We are completely seen and known by the Father who sees in secret. Is our heart motive to be seen as self-righteous before other OR to rest in His righteousness alone?

This all comes down to an abiding relationship with Jesus. We can do all these good things, but if it's not rooted in a heart level abiding in Christ – it's of no kingdom value. We can do nothing apart from Him.

John Stott says, "Christian devotion is secret, motivated by humility and rewarded by God."

See, by definition a reward is earned, so naturally we are going to want to earn our reward. But what if I told you that someone else came and earned it for you. What if I told you that One came to give himself fully to the payment of sin so that you could walk free of guilt and shame. What if I told you that you just stood idly by and didn't do anything to earn it. You just received an inheritance. You just received the benefit. Now you just have to rest in the power of His righteousness.

You don't have to earn favor with God. The reward has already been paid in Christ. You just need to trust in Him. Is the reward from the Father enough? Don't worry about the thoughts of men in this moment as we respond. Let's eagerly cry out to Him and seek His presence. Let's rest in His righteousness, not our own.