

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

Jesus said: "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you..." Did you know that the word "alms" is from the Old English, derived via Latin from the Greek word for "compassion" which comes from the Greek word for mercy (*The Oxford Dictionary of Word Histories*.) In our English, the word "alms" literally means "money and gifts given to the poor." (*Oxford American Dictionary*.)

Jesus emphasizes service for the sake of righteousness, that is being in a state of fellowship with God. If regarding serving, you do what you do for the sake of praise from others, then you have your reward, the Greek word translated as "have" is the word commonly used in payment of bills, so if you're receiving glory from other men and women, then payment has been made in full. If however you serve because you want to please God, then you will receive his blessing.

I like the phrase "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." When I was very young, I remember hearing this read and wondering how on earth you could possibly not let one hand know what the other is doing. I was quite literal minded back then. But what it simply means is we avoid scheming or planning for our own advantage, we give in the spirit of love, in complete trust, no strings attached, no thought of personal benefit or reciprocation coming from our gift.

Now consider that prayer is opening your life to God, to invite God to act in your life, it's not a case of trying to talk God into something, it's accepting God's will and role in our lives. I recall hearing prayers that went on and on and sounded like sermons, I was in seminary at the time and I wondered if the person praying was preaching to God. Prayer to God should be in heartfelt communion with God, prayer is relationship with God, fellowship with God, it's not "trying to make a good impression" on God.

Jesus said: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Jesus is drawing attention to what people prize above everything else to the exclusion of what we might call eternal values. He's warning against putting all your emphasis on what is going to be, one way or another, lost. He's not warning against working for a living, or trying to run a business profitably, but he's warning against a world-mindedness, that concentrates on prosperity in this world to the exclusion of everything else.

Christians, those who truly believe in, follow and try to imitate Christ, must have the right sense of values, and not see worldly success however it's understood, as the aim of all labor and life, in other words, it's the attitude you have toward your possessions, not the amount of your possessions that is dangerous to your soul.

I've heard it said (by someone) that "avarice is the vice of respectability," meaning rich or poor your concentration is on getting more. Everyone has treasure, but the question is whether your treasure is transient (you can't take it with you!) or eternal.

Everyone has some treasure, it seems to be the main object of life, but is it eternal? If it's earthly riches, they can disappear, perhaps through moths or rust, perhaps stolen, perhaps the earthly riches lose their value as happened with a lot of property and investments nine-ten years ago. Understand that though material possessions may appear lasting and substantial, they are all subject to decay or destruction in a variety of ways.

By way of contrast Jesus talks about riches that cannot be lost, decay or be destroyed or stolen, he tells us these are the treasures that are stored up in heaven, neither moth nor rust nor thieves can negate that which is store there.

Then Jesus tells us that where we choose to store our treasure says a great deal about ourselves. Although he doesn't describe treasure in any way but it clearly means what you prize most in life, what you value above all else. Because where we choose to store what we value most shows what our values really are. Those values are deep down hence Jesus describes it as where we've got our treasure, what we value most in the world, that's where our heart is. Now note that Jesus isn't talking about what we might call passing emotions but that on which your life is centered.

Think of it as being in love. When you are in love, you're drawn to the person of your love, in both your thoughts and your practice you contemplate the person of your love. That person is first in your attention, first in your thoughts, first in your heart. Your life is centered accordingly.

AMEN