

INTRODUCTION

We just listened to a couple of Songs, "Doctor My Eyes" by Jackson Browne and "Somewhere over the Rainbow", sung by Israel Kamakawiwa'ole. Both songs are very insightful about things or places or feelings that are seen with the mind's eye. In "Doctor my eyes" he wonders if he will be able to recover his damaged eyesight from living in this world and keeping his eyes open too long. He expresses a vague sense that, "it is later than it seems" and an understanding that there is greater significance to things. "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" is hauntingly beautiful and he desires to go to a better place, "over the rainbow, where he wakes up far beyond the clouds, where trouble "melts like lemon drops" and "blue birds fly" "O why, O why can't I?" They are both great songs and show that people see a deeper reality.

The songs actually make me sad, especially "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" because it is just a dream or a "wish upon a star." He speaks of heaven, without any of the understanding or reality of Jesus Christ; all that he has is a vague desire; a wish upon a star. And that makes me sad. There are so many people all around us that have only a vague idea of something deeper; of a reality that we as believers get to experience every day in knowing God as our Father and Jesus as our savior.

You see this if you attend a funeral of people that do not know Christ. There are hopes of being in a better place and dreams of being together again someday, but we know that it is just a hope and a wish upon a star.

If we look back on our own lives, we realize that there was also a time like that for us. We may forget what it was like before we knew Christ as our Savior and God as our Father. We did not know if God was real, we may have even had fear of God, maybe wishing he did not exist because we

knew we did not know what to do with him or could never live up to whatever it was. All we had was a wish upon a star.

Jesus came and he spoke about realities that people did not know about. He was speaking new things. He also knew that our eyes were damaged by this world and that we needed a fresh look at what was beyond. Jesus says in our passage today from Matthew chapter 6,

<sup>22</sup> “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, <sup>23</sup> but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

In the Sermon on the Mount, that we have been going through for the past few weeks, we see that Jesus is speaking to his disciples and to a larger crowd. Sometimes, it is obvious that he is speaking to his disciples. He says things that he could not say to the crowd, because they had not yet come to know and be changed by Christ.

He tells his disciples, “You are the light of the world” and also that “you are the salt of the earth.” These are things that he could not mean for the masses of people that were there, because they did not yet know him as their savior.

In our passage today we will see that Jesus is primarily speaking about seeing the reality that stands behind. The disciples were hearing about these new realities that they should expect to see. The crowd was also hearing about new realities that somehow, could be true for them, but would require them to see Christ as their savior and Messiah.

We also need fresh eyes to see what we easily forget.

Jesus' teaching challenged the disciples with new realities that they would need to learn. It also challenged the prevailing religious teachings that the Pharisees taught the Jewish people.

**Jesus teaches truths that, though comforting would be shocking to the people and the disciples themselves. He wants to heal our vision so that we:**

- Turn our eyes from ourselves and others.
- Turn our eyes to God as the Father
- Turn our eyes to the Father who sees.
- Turn our eyes to the Father who sees in secret.
- Turn our eyes to the Father who sees in secret and rewards.

*Matthew 6:1–6 (ESV)*

*<sup>1</sup>“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. <sup>2</sup>“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup>But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup>so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

*<sup>5</sup>“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.*

*<sup>6</sup>But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

There are four vignettes in this passage where Jesus is comparing what not to do with what to do instead. It was the current understanding that what religious people should do is to give alms, pray and fast. Jesus does not refute any of this. In fact, he affirms it by assuming that it is true in the lives of the disciples. They should do those things, especially when he will be no longer with them.

But now he warns them of something: Themselves.

Jesus says, “beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them.”

The problem is that our eyes are squarely focused on ourselves and not on God. That is the common problem of humanity. It began way back in the garden with Adam and Eve. When they sinned, the consuming presence of God that was with them, was no longer there. They had to find something to focus their attention on; and it was themselves. What makes me happy? What brings me pleasure? What satisfies my needs? And the habit re-enforced itself hundreds of thousands of times. So, it is no wonder that we are consumed with ourselves; it takes an act of God to cause us to turn our attention away from ourselves to God. It is only by God’s grace that any person can turn their eyes from themselves to God.

Instead of being “religious” to please God, we turn religion into something to please ourselves. We want to turn others' eyes on ourselves; to applaud us or congratulate us to make us feel better about ourselves. Rather than turning others' eyes to God, we want to make little gods of ourselves instead!

So, Jesus warns us about ourselves. Try to keep your good works secret even from yourself. We know that is not possible, but he is saying that we need to be warned about our perverse nature that constantly turns inward.

Martin Luther when speaking about sin said, “I cannot keep the birds from flying around my head, but I can prevent them from building a nest in my hair.” We cannot really act in secret from ourselves, but we don’t need to congratulate ourselves, and when we do, we need to recognize it as sin and confess it.

He says in these first two examples, “sound no trumpet before you” as the hypocrites do; “do not stand in public and pray as the hypocrites do in order to be seen by others.”

**So what we need first, is for Jesus to heal our eyes to look away from ourselves.**

God knows that we have a craving in our hearts for recognition, and he knows that it is misplaced. Our eyes have a need to focus on something. What Jesus is showing the disciples is now that they are saved by faith in himself, is that their eyes can now properly focus on God. We now can turn our eyes to God as our Father and off of ourselves.

TO TURN OUR EYES TO GOD AS THE FATHER

When our eyes are on ourselves, Jesus says you have, “no reward from your Father who is in heaven.” Now to a person brought up in the Jewish faith as all of these disciples and the crowd were, these words would have sounded at least odd, maybe irreverent or even plain blasphemous; calling God our “Father!” But Jesus calls God his father all the time. That would have really ticked off the Pharisees and teachers of the law; “How dare a person call God his own father!” But now Jesus is also encouraging his

disciples and followers to think of God in this new way, and call him “father!”

This is a new reality that Jesus was going to usher in for humanity by his death on the cross. No longer would there be barriers of sin in their relationship with God. The writer of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament is amazed by this as he states in Hebrews 10:19–22 (ESV),

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Jesus is the one that bore our sins so that now we can enter into the very presence of God, and not only that, but call him “father” just like Jesus does.

I remember when I became a new Christian. I was 18 years old, and had received Christ as my savior. I remember that I was overwhelmed with gratitude for having my sins forgiven and I would just pray each night calling out to God, “thank you Father for saving me from my sin.” I knew God was now my father and it is the very best pleasure that a Christian can know!

Romans 8:15–16 (ESV)

<sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God

Jesus wants us to turn our eyes to God as our Father.

TO TURN OUR EYES TO THE FATHER WHO SEES

Let's continue reading in verse 7,

*Matthew 6:7–15 (ESV)*

<sup>7</sup> *“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, **for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.** <sup>9</sup> Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. <sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread, <sup>12</sup> and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. <sup>14</sup> For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, <sup>15</sup> but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

I am not going to go into great detail over the “Lord’s prayer” as it is called. But we need to see that Jesus is telling his disciples, now that you know God as your Father, don’t do what the Gentiles do. A Gentile was any non-Jewish person and one assumed not to know God. They may have worshiped other Gods and used all sorts of incantations or other means to manipulate God. I’ve been in Thailand a number of times, and there you would see little beautifully decorated houses on poles. These were there so that the spirits would inhabit them - and not your own house! Much of the world lives in ignorance of and fear of the spiritual world. God is unknown and if he can be reached, it is not known if he will be favorable to you and you must appease him with offerings or use incantations or other means to “manipulate” him. This is what Jesus is talking against; using meaningless phrases and many words.

Jesus says, verse 8, *“Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”*

Because God is a Father to you, he is intimately connected to you. You live in his house now, so he “sees” you and knows your needs, even before you ask. Again, this sort of intimacy with God would have sounded “new” to the disciples. Jesus was inaugurating something new here.

Now that the disciples have their eyes off of themselves and on God and they see him as their father, now true prayer can begin.

We are not to use the Lord’s prayer as a mantra, repeating it over and over again. That is just what Jesus said NOT to do! Rather we are to use it as a model for prayer to make sure we are properly focused.

First we say, **“Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name.”** We acknowledge God as our intimate Father and recognize that he is supreme and in heaven. What a privilege to know him, and address him as this!

Next we ask for **“his Kingdom to come and his will to be done.”** Isn’t it odd that God created a place where his will is not done? We are living in it. This world of sin and the consequences of sin are seen here. But God has not abandoned us here. His Kingdom will come eventually to this place too. Amen?!

We also ask for **our daily bread**, that our earthly needs would be met. And to meet our biggest need, **that our debts would be forgiven**. We wrack them up every day. But the Bible says, God’s mercies are new every morning.

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We have these purple flowers outside in our front yard. They bloom everyday and everyday the bees fly into them. And in about six hours they

die and then re-bloom again the next day. That is a picture of God's mercy to me every day.

Because we experience God's forgiveness, we need to forgive other people that have wronged us. I know that there are many people here that have deep wounds from someone that has wronged them. Some are so deep that they are hard to even think about. There was a young woman in our church some years ago that was sexually abused by her father for years. He is in prison now, but because of the forgiveness that she found in Christ she was able to go and see her father and tell him that she forgave him.

God expects us to forgive others that wrong us; though he knows it will not be easy and it will be a struggle. There are many wounds that we both give and sustain living in this world. One of the realities of real faith is that we will live in a community that forgives.

Jesus wants us to see that God is our Father who sees. He sees our needs and knows them even before we ask.

TO TURN OUR EYES TO THE FATHER WHO SEES IN SECRET

*Matthew 6:16–18 (ESV)*

<sup>16</sup> *“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. **And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.***

Are Christian's supposed to fast? Jesus assumes that we will; but again, that it be done in secret. Why? Because our Father who sees in secret will reward you. This is the third time that Jesus has said this. It must be important.

Fasting is an exercise in cleansing ourselves, physically and because that is going on, it is a good time to focus spiritually. When the Father sees in secret it implies that God is seeing us, doing the right things for the right reasons. He sees us giving in secret, praying in secret, just us and him, and fasting without sounding an “alarm.” Just us and him. So, when he sees in secret in this context it is because we are doing the right things for the right reason.

**When we truly have God in our sights, his eyes are on us too!** How seldom we let that actually happen!

I can think of times of prayer where I knew that I was totally focused on God and knew that he heard me. The problem is that if I can think of specific times, it means there have not been enough of them!

Let’s continue with the next section, in it, we see that when our life is oriented around God, that he rewards us.

Jesus wants us to turn our eyes from ourselves, toward God, know him as our Father, that sees us and sees what is secret between us and him, and that rewards us for it.

TO TURN OUR EYES TO THE FATHER WHO SEES IN SECRET AND REWARDS

Reading in verse 19,

*Matthew 6:19–34 (ESV)*

<sup>19</sup> “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

<sup>22</sup> *“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, <sup>23</sup> but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*

<sup>24</sup> *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*

<sup>25</sup> *“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. <sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. <sup>34</sup> “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

Jesus tells us in these sayings to not just turn our eyes toward Jesus, but keep them there. Our hearts can only love one thing. We need to keep them loving God, by giving away what is ours, by praying, by fasting, and prioritizing.

We all have jobs and the necessity of making money. God does not fault that; in fact, he commends it. But because we have damaged eyes, they tend to keep turning back towards ourselves.

<sup>22</sup> *“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, <sup>23</sup> but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.*

If the thing that we use to measure truth is wrong, Jesus says, *“If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”*

If our priorities are wrong, then we measure success the wrong way. The light in us is darkness!

Jesus is saying that God wants to reward us for what we do in secret and for what we do with our priorities in our life. Jesus reminds us again,

<sup>32</sup> *For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. <sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

God will reward you in secret. He said this three times in this passage and a little differently at the end. What is it that we need to understand about God wanting to “reward” us?

Doesn't this make seeking after God sort of a mercenary affair?

Mercenaries are soldiers that fight for whoever pays them money, not because of loyalty to their country.

So, if God “rewards” are we not just doing it for the reward?

Well, that is a good question, but God knows that we are dependent creatures. We are dependent on him for our physical existence and so we pray for “daily bread” but also our spiritual existence. Jesus said, “I am the

vine, you are the branches, apart from me, you can do nothing.” We can do nothing without the sustenance that flows from Jesus as the root.

God is pleased when we depend on him. He is actually displeased when we don't depend on him. How many times did God test Israel and chastised them for not depending on him and not trusting him! Those examples are given to us for our instruction.

But the positive examples are also given for our instruction. In Hebrews 11 God's writes a “Hall of fame,” or should I say ‘Hall of Faith’ for those that believed God for what he promised.

<sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Isn't that an odd definition of faith? Believing that he exists and rewards those that seek him? A TV preacher would probably say, “see, God want to reward you,” with money and prosperity and wealth here in this life. But that is not what Jesus said. He said to store up treasure in heaven. Those that have faith like that, please God and he is pleased to reward them!

Hebrews 11:14–16 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup> For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Jesus fixes our eyes by turning them from ourselves, turning them to God, helping us see that God is our Father, and that he sees. That he sees what is private with him, that which we have spoken only to him about, and our Father who sees in secret rewards us.

To me this is the most remarkable truth in the New testament beside Jesus being willing to die for our sins to make it all possible; we have God as our Father. What could there be in the entire universe that is better than that?

“Jesus fix our eyes so that see that the truth” that “*our Father who sees in secret will reward us.*”

Please pray with me.