

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA**

**Charity Rewarded**

**By**

**Rev Todd W. Allen**

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*Matthew 6:1-4*

<sup>1</sup>"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

<sup>2</sup>"So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. <sup>3</sup>"But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup>so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done in secret* will reward you.

In *On This Day* by Carl D. Windsor, the page for Valentine's Day includes this anecdote: "Even the most devoted couple will experience a 'stormy' bout once in a while. A grandmother, celebrating her golden wedding anniversary, once told the secret of her long and happy marriage. 'On my wedding day, I decided to make a list of ten of my husband's faults which, for the sake of our marriage, I would overlook,' she said.

"A guest asked the woman what some of the faults she had chosen to overlook were. The grandmother replied,

'To tell you the truth, my dear, I never did get around to listing them. But whenever my husband did something that made me hopping mad, I would say to myself, Lucky for him that's one of the ten!'" -- Leadership, Vol. 11, no. 2.

Christianity begins and ends with forgiveness. We experience God's love in his forgiveness of our sins. That forgiveness did not come cheap. For God to justify his own righteousness in forgiving me of my sins the Son of God had to come down from heaven and exercise obedience beyond compare. He had to trust God to resurrect him from the cruel and bloody death of the cross. God's forgiveness begets forgiveness.

The Sermon on the Mount draws a portrait of the Christian man. It also gives us vital information about discipleship in a fallen world. We should expect reaction from the world when we take the Word of God seriously and begin to follow Jesus Christ. And we have learned that the highest possible standard is held up for the Christian to follow. We are to strive after perfection in demonstrating our love for God and our fellow man. This is not in order that we might be saved, but because we have been saved.

The teaching of Jesus Christ is sublime. There is no higher or nobler statement of man's call to holiness than what we find in the Sermon on the Mount. A proper understanding of this sermon will literally transform your life. But the very sublimity of its teaching should make us careful that we get into a heavenly frame of mind in order to comprehend it.

Think with me for the moment about the fact that the Sermon on the Mount teaches us that in order to possess the kingdom of heaven and see God that a man or woman, boy or girl must make the painful discovery that he or she is morally bankrupt. The very first utterance out of the mouth of Christ tells us this when he said **blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.**

Bankruptcy is a painful experience. Bankruptcy is the status of a debtor who has been declared by judicial process to be unable to pay his debts. It is a very shattering experience. During the depression years my own father had to declare bankruptcy and it did something to him that I don't believe he ever got over. He was never the same man after that. Unfortunately, he did not at that time turn to the Lord for his support and strength and he and my mother suffered for many years the shock of that experience.

Now if I apply the term bankruptcy to my own soul I come to the realization that morally before God I am bankrupt. When the Holy Spirit convicts of sin and righteousness and judgment a person knows that he is a moral pauper. It is quite literally soul shattering knowledge. Only then will he come to understand what Jesus meant when he said, <sup>3</sup>**"Blessed are the poor in spirit,**  
**4" Blessed are those who mourn.**

A person must experience bankruptcy of soul before he can be admitted to the Kingdom of God. Faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin. If you have saving faith you will also repent of your sins and that will be because you have come to see that you have on filthy rags to cover your nakedness and that before God you are morally bankrupt.

From a human stand-point bankruptcy is a terrible condition but from a spiritual standpoint it is the necessary self-appraisal leading to repentance and faith before I may be admitted to the kingdom of God. Until a person sees that there is no possible way for him to go to heaven by his own moral worth, that all of his righteousness is as filthy rags in the sight of a holy God, he cannot see that the only way he can ever go to heaven is by the mercy and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ who paid the just penalty for his sins on the cross of Calvary.

The man who thinks he has suitable righteousness of his own to qualify for heaven is going to be terribly and horribly devastated in that day he stands before God and finds himself banished from his presence for being a moral bankrupt who never received the gift of righteousness that was freely offered to him in Jesus Christ. So this bankruptcy experience is a blessing if it is declared now in this life in time to acquire the righteousness of God offered freely in Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus said blessed are those who are poor in spirit and mourn for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven and they are comforted.

## **I. The Moral Bankrupt Is Called To A Holy Life**

The beatitudes go on from bankruptcy to blessedness. Now I know that I am delivered from bankruptcy and the judgment of God into the happiness and joy of the kingdom of God. God clothes me with a robe of righteousness and imparts to me his Holy Spirit to enable me to live the Christ life. I am called to a life of righteousness and love. Indeed, Christ tells me to be perfect as my Father in Heaven is perfect. I go from moral bankruptcy to being an adopted son of the living God. Now I have an unlimited checking account in the bank of heaven. My Father in Heaven tells me that Jesus Christ is my righteousness and he possesses a righteousness that is inexhaustible. We can never run out of righteousness because his wealth is beyond measure. We simply confess our need, confess and repent of our sin and he forgives and restores. We can never remain in debt again because he has adopted us into his holy family. Now everything is changed. I am no longer a bankrupt pauper. I am the child of a King and I have a heavenly Father who begins to instruct me in the ways of His Kingdom and his righteousness. I am told to imitate my Lord in the character qualities that belong to him.

This is not an instantaneous transformation for me. I have to get rid of my old street language and my former way of life has to be cast aside.

When the prodigal son returned to his father's house his father saw him a long way off and ran and embraced him and kissed him. The son confessed to his father, **father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his slaves, "quickly bring out the best robe and**

put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found. (Luke 15:20-24).

Now that the prodigal son has on a beautiful robe and a signet ring of his father, he does not continue in his former foolishness and wanton lifestyle. He wants to please his father and he adopts the ways and manners and language of his father. All that the Father has is his and he is grateful to his father for forgiving him and putting him back as a son in the family.

In Matthew 5 our Lord tells us that we are not to be like the Gentiles who love only their own. We are to be like our heavenly Father in loving even our enemies, in having a concern for all men. Now in chapter 6 he speaks of how we are to practice the righteousness he has called us to. It is a righteousness that is pure and heavenly. Therefore it has in it no hypocrisy or ulterior motive. We are not to practice righteousness before men in order to be noticed of them, to be applauded by them. And he uses the illustration of giving alms, praying and fasting. Don't, says Christ, sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do. In fact, don't even let the left hand know what the right hand is doing when you do your alms.

The problem I have is that my natural desire is to get something back for my giving, my charity. I want to be rewarded for being such a good person. I want my righteousness acts to be noticed and commended.

Every year Jerry Lewis has a gigantic telethon to raise money for muscular dystrophy. Hour after hour individuals and companies are recognized as having made contributions. And millions of dollars are raised for a very worthy cause. But it is a continuous trumpet sounding for all involved. The whole world knows what most people give, especially some of the companies that participate. Their advertising benefit is enormous. Jesus says, they have their reward.

If we do good only in order to be praised by men we are motivated by pride. In that case my righteousness is not true righteousness. It is tainted. It is contaminated; it does not measure up to heavenly standards. There is a reward for that sort of charity but it is strictly earthly recognition, not heavenly.

## **II. For Charity To Be Rewarded By Heaven It Must Be Practiced Secretly**

The Lord wants us to rise above the world's selfish and hypocritical methods of practicing our righteousness.

The righteousness of God is sublime and pure and holy. Ours must be like His. The practical outworking of doing acts of charity and goodwill must be done in such a way that self-glorification is avoided.

Now this can be a very subtle thing. In trying to be sensitive to the needs of others, in trying to be loving and caring, I can subconsciously begin to be a little bit proud of what I do." I can even mentally begin to keep score of my good deeds. But our Lord says that I should not even let my right hand know what my left hand is doing. The moment pride creeps in to what I do it is spoiled.

When Christ taught in Matthew 25 about the Judgment he said that the sheep would be rewarded because when he was hungry, they gave Him something to eat; when He was thirsty, they gave Him drink; when he was a stranger, they invited Him in; when naked they clothed Him; When He was sick, they visited Him.

When he was in prison they came to him. And his record of their good deeds perplexed them. They did not recall ever having done these things to Christ. But he told them. **"Truly I say to you; To the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to me.** (Matt. 25:40).

They did their deeds of righteousness without a selfish motive. They had not kept score. They just did it spontaneously and willingly and unobtrusively. But the Lord had seen what they did and now comes the reward, the reward of the truly righteous. This is a righteousness that flows from a converted heart. Jesus says of such works of righteousness, **your father who sees in secret will repay you.**

Salvation is a gift, unearned and undeserved, but once a person receives that gift of God there is a life of righteousness which ensues and which is recognized and rewarded. We are to forgive those who have hurt or injured us or cheated us. We don't condone their bad conduct we just recognize that they have the same need we had for God's mercy and forgiveness and we act charitably toward them. We apply forgiveness in the same way that Christ forgave us. We return good for evil.

May the works of righteousness that we do be done quietly and unobtrusively, without any expectation of reward or gain in this life. Let it be a holy and genuine desire to glorify our Father who is in Heaven. Let us disdain the applause of the world and the praise of men and seek only for the approval and praise of our God. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. We live constantly in His presence. He sees all and knows all. May your life and my life be more and more consecrated to Him and to His glory alone.

A little country boy was out fishing with only a switch for a pole and a bent pin for a hook, but he was catching fish right and left. A city fellow who had spent much time fishing with the most elaborate tackle and gear came across to the boy with his string of fish and asked him the reason for his success. The boy said,

"The secret of it all is that I keep myself out of sight."

We must keep ourselves out of sight if we desire to be a blessing to others. John the Baptist kept himself out of sight. He said of the Lord, "**He must increase, but I must decrease.**" He went before the Lord and paved the way for Him and then stepped aside and let the Lord receive the glory. May you and I do likewise!

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**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA  
519 MAIN STREET  
VILLA RICA, GA. 30180  
770-459-5276**

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