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Sound No Trumpet

980-B

Series: Let God Be God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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They had followed Him up the side of the mountain. There He paused, sat down on a rock, looked at them with those eyes of love that so perfectly blended authority with compassion, and began to speak. To them, no doubt, it was just another opportunity to hear this amazing carpenter talk of things eternal. Little did they know that in the next few hours, God Himself was going to draw a series of word pictures on the canvas of reality, and when He had finished, they would have received their first real glimpse of the Kingdom of God.

They had, perhaps, somewhat of an idea that this kingdom would be slightly different than what they had envisioned. Or did they? Surely by now they knew that the web of religiosity spun by the Pharisees and Scribes was not the answer to knowing God. Or did they? We do not know. We do know, however, that by the time this soft-spoken man with the penetrating eyes was finished today, they would have heard for the first time, a full-fledged outline of a life 180 degrees at odds with theirs. One thing was for sure; it was a whole new concept of living, a concept so different it required something supernatural to make it work.

It was a life that would not belong to the aggressor, but to the meek. It was not promised to the haughty, but to the poor in spirit. It was not guaranteed to those who were merry, but to those who mourned. It was not for the popular, but for the persecuted. It was a concept of *living* that came from *dying*. It was a life carved out of the spiritual materials that surface when life is lived in the real world inhabited by a real God. No more play-acting. No more going through the motions. There was something about the kingdom that was being unveiled on this mountain that day that spoke of shoe-leather godliness in a world filled with pain and injustice.

But apparently it would have to be acted on to make a difference because this One who claimed to be the Son of God had drawn practical word pictures about salt that had lost

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its savor and candles hidden under a table. He then applied those pictures to those followers of His who failed to be in the marketplace what they claimed to be in the synagogue. Then He went on. He spoke of such personal things as anger and lust, of divorce and marriage, of resisting authority, and of loving your enemies. A far cry it was from the cold, impractical teachings of the Pharisees. This man was talking about real responses to real hurts in a real world. And the responses He was painting were so different from what they had always been taught, that the audience by now must have been clothed in silence.

The Master was a long way from being finished. In essence, He had only constructed the foundation on which He planned to build a whole new lifestyle. The seminar was far from over, and the most practical of all His subject matter was yet to come. So it is here that we resume our look at this message on the mount that changed the course of history.

We take up reading in Matthew 6 where Jesus began teaching now on the evidences of deeper spirituality. He determined to take the three most vital signs of Hebrew commitment and strip them of their surface religiosity, exposing the roots of motivation. Then He planned to tell them just what God was looking for. Hold on to your robes and sandals, gang, God is about to tell it like it is. Listen from The Life of Christ in Stereo. He is about to speak.

Take heed not to do your good works before men to be seen by them, else you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

“So when you are giving alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do, in the synagogues and the streets, to have the applause of men. Verily, I say to you, they are having their full reward. But you, in giving alms, let not your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your alms may be in secret; and your Father, who sees in secret, will himself reward you.

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners, that they may be conspicuous before men. Verily, I say to you, they are having their full reward. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and with closed door pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:1-6 TLOCIS)¹

¹ The Life of Christ in Stereo: The Four Gospels Speak in Harmony; by Johnston M. Cheney; © 1969 Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon

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Moreover, when you fast, be not downcast in face like the hypocrites; for they distort their appearance so that their fasting may be noticed by men. Verily, I say to you, they are having their full reward. But you, in your fasting, groom your head with oil and wash your face, that your fasting may not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

(Matthew 6:16-18 TLOCIS)

The Word of God must have penetrated that crowd like a rifle shot, with a depth they had not heard before. No longer were they hearing about what man must do to please God. Now they were hearing about the heart motivations a man must have to do it. No longer were they hearing about the things a man must do to be religious. Now they were hearing about the religious things a man could do that in and of themselves could actually be signs of hypocrisy rather than signs of spirituality. It was almost as though this amazing carpenter had just dug a hole in the ground on that rugged hillside and prepared to bury the Pharisees, either one at a time or at group rates. But it wasn't just the Pharisees He was after. It was me. It was you. It was every man and woman who would ever learn to walk with God and then learn that walking with God carries with it certain apparently inalienable rights such as the right to be seen, the right to become a proud, egotistical hypocrite. Jesus dug that hole big enough for all of us, then carefully told us how to keep from falling in.

The title of this lesson is “Sound No Trumpets”. The outline looks like this:

- I- The Premise
- II- The Problem
- III- The Principle
 - A- Right-handed generosity
 - B- Unmarked closets
 - C- Put on a happy face
- IV- The Promise

I- THE PREMISE

To the Jew, there were three great religious activities that set a man apart as spiritually successful: almsgiving, praying and fasting. These were the hallmarks of a religious man. And it was, strangely enough, here that Jesus chose to pull back the layers

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of artificial godliness and expose man for what he really is apart from the grace of God.

We are not dealing with unbelief. We are not dealing with murder, adultery, extortion or any other violation of the moral law of man or the written law of God. We are, rather, dealing with the very activities that the Jewish world of His day considered to set a man apart as spiritually mature. And we are looking beyond the morality to the motivation.

God is speaking, and He is saying that He is not impressed and man will not be rewarded *for the activities he performs*, but rather *for the glory that accrues to God for that activity*. He appears to be saying that if the result of our religious disciplines is to our credit rather than God's, not only is God *not impressed*, He is *insulted*. Not only are we not counted to be spiritual, we are counted to be, by Jesus' own words, "hypocrites." And the word "hypocrites" would not be easily understood. The Greek word used here was literally the word used for an actor in a play. It speaks of one who was "putting on a show" or pretending to be someone he was not.

The inference was that man might be fooled, but not the God who looks on the heart. And so Jesus continues the process of uncovering a whole new dimension of heart attitude theology, a theology that would reveal the real location of the Kingdom of God and would, in the process, destroy the very foundations of man's religious system.

There is one interesting premise upon which Jesus built this theology that must be explored. We might call it the "when assumption." You find it nestled comfortably in the context of the passage. It reads, "when you give," (verse 2); "when you pray," (verse 5); "when you fast," (verse 16). It is not, then, a commandment to give or to pray or to fast. It *assumes* that, as God's child, you do these things automatically, consistently and without apology. (Ouch!)

It only questions whether or not you do them *sincerely*, without play-acting. Nor does Jesus imply that we *stop* doing them. He only insists that we do them to the Father's glory. So the "when assumption" is the premise upon which the Master builds. These were not religious novices. It was assumed that they gave generously, prayed often and fasted when needed. It was assumed of them.

II- THE PROBLEM

Well, then, what's the problem? If we give, pray and fast, we surely aren't the ones God needs to be worried over. He's got a world of irreligious, immoral rebels out there that need His attention. Why focus on those of us who are religious? Back to the saltshaker. Back to the hidden candle. Winning the world would not be a problem if the salt stayed salty, and the lamp stayed lit. The problem was salt that looked like salt but tasted flat and candles that wouldn't stay lit and didn't give light. The problem was people *who did good works*, but when men saw their works, they gave the glory to the men who did them. Ah! Now we're getting warm. "Take heed," Jesus said, "not to do your good works before men to be seen of them."

III- THE PRINCIPLE

So the Master now takes the principle and clearly applies it to the three areas of religious activity considered the most spiritual by the Jews of His day.

A- Right-Handed Generosity - "When you give..."

First He said, "When you give". The giving of alms was the most sacred of all religious duties for the Jew. It was so sacred, in fact, that the same Hebrew word was translated both "almsgiving," and "righteous". To give alms and to be righteous were virtually synonymous. In fact, the highest teaching of the Rabbis coincided perfectly with what Jesus was about to say. The problem was not in theory, but in practice. As one rabbinical writing so perfectly worded it, "He who gives alms in secret is greater than Moses." Listen, then, once again, to Jesus' penetrating statement:

So when you are giving alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do, in the synagogues and the streets, to have the applause of men. Verily, I say to you, they are having their full reward. But you, in giving alms, let not your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your alms may be in secret; and your Father, who sees in secret, will himself reward you. (Matthew 6:2-4 TLOCIS)

Sound No Trumpet! Jesus explains His cardinal rule in the exercise of spiritual disciplines. Suddenly, those very activities the Pharisees had been flaunting as emblems of their righteousness turned like boomerangs and went flying back as testimonies of their own hypocrisy. Sound No Trumpet! Does

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that mean that they no longer could parade their giving as proof of their piety? Does it mean they could no longer “accidentally” be sure to be noticed when the offerings for the poor were taken in the synagogue?

Sound No Trumpet! Does that mean that Jesus would be unimpressed with bulletin boards at the front of the church that tell how much we gave that day? Does that mean that Jesus would be unimpressed with published reports of who gave what to the building fund? Does that mean that Jesus would be unimpressed with public announcements or bronze plaques in honor of certain people who gave the pew or the piano or the rostrum? Does that mean that we don’t even need to whisper to our best friend how much we plan to give to the fund for the hungry? Does that mean that nobody needs to know that we gave our extra car for the pastor to use? Does that mean that the board of elders or deacons shouldn’t peruse the financial records to see who gave what? Does that mean that when we volunteer to help Widow Smith with her groceries, nobody needs to know but Widow Smith? What? Not even Widow Smith? Oh.

That’s what it means to Sound No Trumpet. It means our giving must be kept secret between us and a private God. It means that if it were possible, our left hand would not even know that our right hand had written out the check. It means that the only one who would ever know how much we gave is God.

It also means we don’t try to keep it a secret in such a way that we intentionally let it slip and compound the hypocrisy by broadcasting our generosity while pretending we never intended to. It may even mean that to wear a badge indicating that you joined the “President’s Club” or the “Fisherman’s Select Society” by giving to Evangelist Jones or the “Creative Bible Beggars of the Air” is tantamount to sounding a trumpet. Whether in the streets (outside the confines of the church itself) or in the synagogue (to parade your goodness before God’s people), Jesus indicated one was as bad as the other. Real giving, Jesus was saying, is a well-kept secret between a man and His God. Real charity, Jesus was saying, will be done behind closed doors, anonymously, without recognition, fanfare or applause. Then, Jesus concluded, it will accrue glory to God, and God, in turn, will accrue rewards for you in heaven, for what we will be rewarded for will be what God did that glorified God!

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B- Unmarked Closets – “When you pray...”

Next, Jesus carries the same theme into the most private realm of a man’s life, the prayer closet. And what He says, in essence, is that prayer prayed there is heard only by God. Prayer prayed elsewhere is heard by man. Jesus contrasts the hypocrites who loved to pray in conspicuous places where their piety could be noticed with the real man of God who was faithful to “go into the inner room and with closed door pray to the Father who is in secret.” Not only were we to save our prayer for the prayer closet, we were to have unmarked prayer closets.

Does that mean that when I parade my prayer list before my friends I am not praying in secret? Probably. Does that mean when I leave the door open so my family can see that I’m praying, I’m not praying in secret? Probably. Does it mean that when I can’t be quiet about my quiet time, I’m not praying in secret? Probably. Does it mean that if I’m more anxious to share my answered prayer with men than I am with God I’m not praying in secret? Possibly.

After reading this passage again, I’m not so sure about saying grace in restaurants so we can be noticed. I’m sure the motive is the main thing. But I’m also sure that God can just as surely hear us without our eyes closed and a halo over our heads. I know it can be a testimony to others, but I wonder what our basis for using prayer as a testimony is? And I wonder if we prayed without being noticed, if God couldn’t see that those we needed to touch would be impressed rather by the godliness of our lives rather than the conspicuousness of our prayers?

After reading this passage again, I’m not too sure about the kinds of prayers we often have in board meetings and prayer meetings either. They often become a cross between prayer and performance. Have you ever been called on to pray aloud and been more concerned about how you sounded to those around you than how you sounded to God? I have. I always want to be sure not to say the same thing Brother Smith just said. I guess I’m afraid God might get bored. Maybe some of the time, at least, we need to share our prayer requests out loud and then pray in private. Maybe.

“When you pray,” Jesus said, “sound no trumpets!” How you pray and when you pray and if you pray is a solemn, holy secret. If you must tell about it to be sure others know about it, it turns

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from a holy secret to an unholy source of pride. You would never publish in a paper or testify in a meeting of the precious, quiet things you whisper to one you love. It would mar the tenderness of it, the privacy of it. When you pray, not if, but when, and it ought to be often, sound no trumpets. If you do, men will hear you and be impressed. But praying to men is a useless exercise in futility. Instead, slip quietly into your prayer closet and make sure even the sign on the closet marked “prayer” can no longer be seen by anyone but God.

C- Put on a Happy Face – “When you fast...”

The third “when assumption” assumes that the believer fasts. It assumes that, when the occasion calls for it, to go without physical nourishment to heighten the impact of spiritual nourishment is a foregone conclusion. It also assumes that no one will ever know but God.

Does that mean that “group fasting” may lose its meaning? Perhaps. Does that mean that publicized fasts cease to be fasts? Perhaps. Does it mean that if you fast and go grumpy and sour-faced so people will know you haven’t eaten that you haven’t fasted? You bet it does. Jesus said, “When you fast, put on a happy face. Comb your hair. Wash your face. Go out into the world with the same sense of excitement and contentment you would have if you had just finished a T-bone steak. Spiritually you have. Then no one but God will know you have fasted. And no one but God will be glorified. Then your Father, the only One who sees what you do in secret, will openly be pleased with the reality of your worship.”

IV- THE PROMISE

Which brings us to the bottom line. The whole premise is based on a promise, a promise of eternal rewards. Too many people today scorn the concept of rewards as psychologically unacceptable. They say that you warp a child’s motivation by rewarding him for what he has done that is good. Pity. God’s principles are never out of date. God utilized the rewards principle as a primary means to encourage His children to obedience. It began with Israel, and it will end in eternity when the church stands before the Bema Seat to receive rewards or crowns for the things we have allowed God’s Spirit to do through us. And the more we have allowed Him to do without sharing in the glory,

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the more we will have with which to worship Him. Thus, we'll be giving yet more and more glory to Him, the only One in heaven who can receive glory and the only One on earth who should.

What Jesus was saying with all three of these warnings was this: every act and every activity carries with it potential rewards. Those things which carry eternal rewards, those things that have the capacity to glorify Jesus, carry with them a clear, distinct choice. Each one will be rewarded, either in this life or in the next, either at the hands of men or at the hands of God. None will be rewarded in both. Each reward will be like a precious coin of priceless value. You can save it until you are face-to-face with the One who knows its value and redeems it for its real worth; or you can, in a moment of selfish thoughtlessness, drop the same coin in a soft drink machine and trade it for a Coca-Cola. This time the Coke will not be the real thing. You will get what you wanted. Even trade. You will simply have missed something so much more beautiful, so much more bountiful, so much more meaningful, that your whole life could have been changed by waiting.

The Master coin collector knows the value of the glory coins we spend along the way. He prefers that we send them on ahead to the Bank of Eternity where they will draw maximum interest and one day be recognized for what they really are. But we can grasp for the plaudits the world affords and drop the coins meant for the vaults of heaven into the vending machines of this world that dispense instant glory. We won't be cheated, humanly speaking. We will receive the glory we paid for, and we will miss the blessing we would have had, had we quietly saved the glory for God.

The phrase used in this passage translated, "they have their reward," literally means, "they have received their payment in full." It was a term used in the technical and commercial world in Jesus' day when something had been paid in full, and there was nothing left due. That's what the Master meant here. Get your glory here and when you get to heaven, you'll only find a receipt marked, "Glory dispensed on earth: No payment due." Think about that every time you put a coin in a vending machine. Think about "Glory Coins," and about God's wonderful blessings that can only be redeemed in one world or the other. That's what Jesus was saying.

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He was saying, “When you give, sound no trumpets. No one need know you gave but God. When you pray, sound no trumpets. No one need know you’ve prayed but God. When you fast, sound no trumpets. No one need know you’ve fasted but God.” If God knows, no one else needs to. He keeps perfect records. You don’t need a back-up system in case His computer crashes. It never has.

The King of Glory has just addressed what must have been a somewhat dazed group of disciples about a very personal matter, the matter of glory. I do not know how much they understood. I do not know how much we understand. Our perspective, even yet, is limited by the traditions of men and the concepts of the world. We want to be God’s men and women without reservation. Yet again and again, the world tries successfully to squeeze us into its mold. Here is a prime example. We have translated the recognition system of our age into the realm of the Spirit and assumed that God wants the world to know how spiritual we are so they can be amazed.

What we have forgotten is that true spirituality is an invisible garment. No one sees it but God. Men look at it, but they do not see our good works and glorify us. They see what He’s done and glorify Him. We ought not, then, to even be conscious of the works, let alone grasping to be recognized. We ought to be so caught up in letting God be God in us that we are simply, moment-by-moment, overwhelmed at who HE is, not who we are, not even what we are becoming by His grace — just in awe of who HE is.

If we are living in that kind of victory, one thing will be certain. We will sound no trumpets at all.

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