

Doing Right Things Right Sitting at the Feet of Yeshua

In this post, we continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount by turning to Matthew Chapter 6.

As a quick reminder, in Chapter 5 we learned about the characteristics of a blessed Believer. We learned how blessed are those who wait upon the Lord; who passionately pursue God; who truly live out the Golden Rule; and, who make peace even when confronted with persecution. We also learned that by our character and deeds, we are to make our influencing faith a force for good in the lives of our neighbors by being salt and light.

We also concentrated on what I called the Eternal Torah. In the Torah, God reveals His standards for holy living. Yeshua completed the Torah; He did NOT abolish the Torah. He came to bring us back to God's original intent of His instructions to Israel, so that by grace we may learn to live a Torah-observant lifestyle. We also looked at Yeshua's teaching on murder, adultery, divorce, taking of vows, retaliation and loving our enemies. In this post, we will concentrate on Yeshua's teaching regarding acts of righteousness.

Acts of Righteousness

"Be careful not to parade your acts of tzedakah in front of people in order to be seen by them! If you do, you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So, when you do tzedakah, don't announce it with trumpets to win people's praise, like the hypocrites in the synagogues and on the streets. Yes! I tell you, they have their reward already! But you, when you do tzedakah, don't even let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Then your tzedakah will be in secret; and your Father, who sees what you do in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:1-4).

We will learn in future posts that Matthew 6 deals with the true righteousness practiced in a believer's life. Recall that Yeshua has already said, ***"For I tell you that unless your righteousness is far greater than that of the Torah-teachers and P'rushim, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven!"*** (Matthew 5:20) Now, Yeshua speaks to our acts of tzedakah.

Traditionally, doing *tzedakah* means giving to charity or doing acts of mercy. To the Jewish people, almsgiving was the most sacred of all religious duties. How sacred it was may be seen in the use of the word *tzedakah*. It is used both for righteousness and almsgiving.

By Yeshua's day, the righteousness of the P'rushim had become insincere and dishonest. Doing tzedakah was an important discipline for them. Yeshua did not condemn these practices, but He did caution us to make sure that our hearts are right as we practice them. The P'rushim used almsgiving to gain favor with God and attention from men, both of which were wrong motives. True righteousness must come from within. We should test ourselves to see whether we are sincere and honest in our acts of tzedakah. No amount of giving can purchase our salvation; for salvation is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). To live for the praise of man is foolishness because the glory of man does not last (1 Peter 1:24). It is the glory and praise of God that really counts!

Our priorities must be ordered so that the spiritual things we want to do take precedence over physical things. God knows our physical needs and will see that they are met, if we put Him first. Yeshua reminds us that we should be constantly conscious of God's presence, for He observes and evaluates all of our actions (Acts 17:28; Hebrews 4:13). We should guard ourselves against pride. Pride will cause us to be discontent with our circumstances, thinking we deserve more than we have. It causes us to strive and be contentious.

It is a strange fact that acts of tzedakah can readily lend themselves to wrong motives. It was Yeshua's warning that, when these things were done with the sole intention of bringing glory to the doer, they lost the

most important part of their value. A man may give alms, not really to help the person to whom he gives, but simply to demonstrate his own generosity and to bask in the warmth of someone's gratitude and men's praise.

As Yeshua saw it, there is no doubt at all that doing tzedakah is rewarded. Two times Yeshua uses the phrase; **"they have their reward already"** (Matthew 6:2, 5). It might be better to translate it: *"They have received payment in full."* The Greek word that is used here is a technical business term for receiving payment in full. It was the word that was used on receipted accounts. For instance, a tax collector gives a receipt, saying, "I have received the payment (or the reward) in full from you for the tax which was due."

Essentially, Yeshua is saying: *"If you do tzedakah to demonstrate your own generosity, you will get the admiration of men, but that is all you will ever get. That is your payment in full. If you pray in such a way as to flaunt your piety in the face of men, you will gain the reputation of being an extremely devout man, but that is all you will ever get. That is your payment in full. If your one aim is to get yourself the world's rewards, no doubt you will get them, but you must not look for the rewards which God alone can give."*

What **are** some of the motives that lie behind the act of giving?

1. We can give from a sense of duty. We may give not because we want to give, but because we feel that giving is a duty that we cannot escape. We give out of a sense of guilt.
2. We may give from motives of prestige. We may give to get some glory from giving. Chances are that if no one knows about our giving, or if there is no publicity attached to it, we might not give at all. We give, not primarily to help the poor, but to gratify our own vanity and our own sense of power.
3. We may give simply because we have to give. We may give simply because the overflowing love and kindness within our heart may compel us to give. We may give because we cannot rid ourselves of the personal sense of responsibility for someone in need.

We have the pattern for this perfect giving in Yeshua himself. He gave His life that we might live. Our giving must never be the grim and self-righteous outcome of a sense of duty, still less must it be done to enhance our own glory and prestige among men; it must be the instinctive outflow of a loving heart; we must give to others as Yeshua gave himself to us. Again, this is an issue of the heart.

In my next post, we will continue in Matthew 6 by exploring the preparations for prayer.