

FOUNDATIONS FOR
LAITY RENEWAL

Transforming Daily Life

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Three Sermon Outlines on
Work and Faith

“Living the Will of God”

Tod Bolsinger, M.Div., Ph.D.

SERMON NOTES

*The
High Calling
of Our
Daily Work*

*Making a real living connects you to a bigger picture,
a grand design, an abundant life.
Each of us has only a small part to play, but what a part!
It's the high calling of our daily work.*

– Howard Butt, Jr., of Laity Lodge
TheHighCalling.org

Three Sermons on Living the Will of God

“On Earth as It Is in Heaven...” Tod Bolsinger, M.Div., Ph.D.

A Note from the Author

At the center of the Christian faith is a distinctive sermon. In the center of that sermon is a chapter with a distinctively Christian prayer. And in the center of that prayer is a distinctively Christian petition: “*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth...*”

For Jesus, the very heart of his mission was the proclamation and demonstration of the Kingdom of God. And bringing God’s reign and rule—God’s will—into every human heart, every earthly sphere, every location, place, position, and purpose is the mission of every follower of Jesus today. As Abraham Kuyper famously declared, “*There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’*”

But that mission is not natural to us. We, by nature, live for ourselves. We want our will to be done, not God’s will. We wrestle with the will of God. We struggle with yielding our wills and living out God’s mission from the center of our beings. When it is done from a place of humility and openness, the wrestling with God becomes the transformation of our wills. Salvation is offered and accepted and God’s reign (and the joy and peace of living into and out of that reign) rules our lives. As beloved creatures, we are invited by Jesus to receive life and adoption, to become truly children of our Heavenly Father. When we accept that invitation and become followers of Jesus, we are given Jesus’ own Spirit to transform us so that our lives become the answer to the prayer at the center of Jesus’ own life: “Your Kingdom Come, O Father. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” That transformation is what the Sermon on the Mount and especially Matthew Chapter 6 is all about.

The three outlines presented here are as follows:

1. Closet Christians: How Secrecy Leads to Spirituality
2. The God Who Is Into Everything
3. Worrying Well

Sermon 1

Closet Christians: How Secrecy Leads to Spirituality

Scripture

Matthew 6:1-4

¹ *Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

² *“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (NRSV)*

Outline

Theme: World-transforming, Kingdom living is cultivated in secret and rewarded by God.

1. Cultivated in Secret

Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2. Rewarded by God

...and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Sermon Development

According to Jesus, those who become kingdom disciples are the most *essential* people on the planet, preserving what is good, saving the world, revealing the light of God's presence to all of creation. Starting in chapter 6, we see how Jesus is transforming us *for this vocation*. That is, growing beyond our human tendency toward self-promotion, self-acclaim, and self-centeredness so that we can become truly Kingdom-focused and the true salt and light for the world.

Here is the strategy: **World-transforming, Kingdom living is cultivated in secret and rewarded by God.**

Through acts of charity and ministry, times of prayer and spiritual discipline in private, unnoticed by the world, we are transformed.

1. Cultivated in Secret

Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Wait! Didn't Jesus just say a few paragraphs earlier, “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven”? Isn't our purpose to reveal God's presence in the world? To do good that gets the goodness of God noticed? How are we to “let our lights shine” and “beware of practicing (our) piety before others” at the same time? Aren't those two verses in contradiction to each other?

No. Not if we read the Bible carefully. The text doesn't say *Beware of practicing your piety before others*” period. Instead it says, *Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them*. The problem is not in being seen, but in the *motivation* of doing good in order to be seen by others.

If we come to church for the sake of business contacts, our reputation in the community, or to impress our parents or some girl in homeroom, we are missing the point, Jesus says. If we give or serve or talk publicly about our faith so that it will look good on a resume, a college application, or community P.R. that is all we will get.

Schools and hospitals and charitable organizations by the thousands have figured out that if you'll post the names of the givers in a prominent place, more people will give. Put up a poster, put their picture on a plaque, name a building after someone and you'll get way more “alms” for your cause than if you simply ask people to give for God's sake.

Yes, it's natural to want praise. It's natural to want recognition. But there is a warning built in here.

Our desire for praise and recognition *from people* can in the long run keep us from actually making a difference in our world. What happens when our good deeds are NOT praised by people? What if we love our enemies, when the people around us want them punished? What if righteousness demands forgiving someone that the world deems unforgiveable? What if we live out our faith in a cause that is unpopular, unrewarded, even costly to career or resume?

Jesus has told us that as his Kingdom followers our crucial responsibility is to be the light of the world—even if that means that our very acts of goodness and piety are like shining a light in eyes that have been accustomed to the darkness.

If we are to be those who help God to preserve and save the world and reveal his presence at work in the world, then we will have to be changed. We will have to stop operating with our old nature and will need to become people of God's new Kingdom nature.

And first we need to be freed from our need for human praise above all things.

We need the spiritual discipline of secrecy, the practice of "Closet Christianity." This isn't to say that we should never pray publicly or claim our charitable giving on our tax returns, or that we can't ask for support from a friend when we are trying to practice spiritual disciplines, it just means that the life-transforming power of giving, praying, and spiritual disciplines comes when they are practiced for God's notice alone.

For me as a pastor, it means that my spiritual life can't be limited to what I do on Sunday mornings, but that I prepare for my public role in the long moments when I am alone with Christ in the early morning, or when I respond to God's spirit in secret acts of generosity.

Slowly over time in the intimacy of those moments, practicing our "righteousness" before God alone, we learn to love God's rewards more than anything else—including the praise of people that most of us so desperately crave.

World-transforming, Kingdom living is *cultivated in secret* and *rewarded by God*.

2. Rewarded by God

...and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Jesus understands that we need praise and recognition. Notice that he doesn't tell us to rid ourselves of all desire for praise and recognition. He doesn't tell us to do good for no rewards, with no desires or needs. That is more like Buddhism than Christianity. Jesus doesn't try to abolish our desire for reward, but instead, redirects us to seek rewards only from God. This is how we overcome our tendency to strive for human reward: by seeking God's reward alone.

Notice also that these verses are about "giving alms" or practicing charity. Notice that there is nothing necessarily wrong with giving for the sake of recognition. Indeed, as I said before far more gets done in the world by giving recognition for acts of giving than by not. But, what Jesus is saying is that if you give for the sake of being seen, recognized, and rewarded by others, that is all you will get. That is your reward. You want your name on a building, a plaque, or a banner? Fine. But that is all the reward there is.

If, however, you do your acts of charity in secret, you will be rewarded by God. But what is that reward from God? Notice that it is not a promise of FUTURE reward. It doesn't say, "Then you'll get your reward in heaven from your Father," but instead that "your Father in heaven will reward you." The point is not *when* we get our reward, but from *whom*. And for the Christian, there is no better reward than the approval of God himself.

As N. T. Wright has written, "Simply knowing God better is reward enough." The reward that we are to desire, to seek, to work for and earn by our righteousness is nothing more or nothing less than knowing God, being close to God, having more and more of the character of God in our lives.