We come today to chapter 6 of the gospel of Matthew and the question of Christian piety which is the first 18 verses but omitting verses 7–15, which we shall be looking at next time. We take, in other words, the three passages about almsgiving, praying, and fasting and the difference between Christian piety and pharisaic piety. And the passage we leave out in the middle has to do not with pharisaic piety but with pagan piety and how pagans pray in heaping up empty phrases. So we see that Jesus calls us to be different from both the Pharisees and from the pagans in the way in which we practice our piety.

Perhaps we could look back just a moment and see how this fits in to the sermon as a whole. You’ll remember that we began with the Beatitudes which we entitled “A Christian’s Character” because the Beatitudes give us a comprehensive and balanced portrait of what the citizens of the kingdom of God should be like. We went on to consider a Christian’s influence if he exhibits such a character, namely, as salt and light in the secular community. We went on then, our last two lectures, on a Christian’s righteousness, which is to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees; because it accepts the full implications of the moral law of God without dodging any of these demands. And it is an inner righteousness of heart and mind and motive. And we saw how Jesus related this to the six antitheses about murder, adultery, divorce, and so on.

So we come now to another whole aspect of Christian living that we’re calling Christian piety. Take the word from the first verse, “Beware of practicing your piety before men.” The King James Version which has almsgiving is a translation of one particular Greek word eleémósuné, whereas the better Greek reading is dikaiosune, and it’s almost certainly a more general word for righteousness in the sense of devotional righteousness, the practice of piety in these three realms.

But I want to ask you immediately to look at verse 8. Although it comes in the passage that we’re going to look at next week, it seems to be a kind of text that gives us the clue to the understanding of the whole of this chapter and the first five words “do not be
like them.” I would even suggest these should either literally or symbolically be underlined in our version of the Bible because they are in many ways the most important monosyllables of the whole Sermon on the Mount. They indicate Christ’s call to His people to be different, because God’s people are a holy people. And a holy people means a separate, distinct, or different people. Even if you don’t like the word holy because it has overtones of pietism and so on, try the word different. Different is a good modern word for holy. To be holy is to be different. It’s to be set apart for God and set apart from the world, to be different, called out from the world to belong to God, to honor God, to obey God, to accept God’s standards, and we are not to conform to the people around us. We are not to ape contemporary fashion. We are to have different standards; namely, the standards of God.

I want to enlarge on this in a moment, because it is really a clue to the understanding of the whole of the Sermon on the Mount. And I would like us to see the continuity of this theme right through Scripture, because this was already clear in the Old Testament. I wonder if you know, for example, let me quote to you Leviticus 18:3–4 where God says through Moses, “You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt where you dwelt. You shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall do My ordinances and keep My statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God.” There you see is exactly the same teaching. You are not to do what they do in Egypt, in Canaan, or in any of the secular, foreign culture in which you may find yourself. You are not to follow them and their statutes. You are to follow My statutes, and you are to do what I say. Your standards are to be My standards and not the standards of the world around you.

Now the Christian church stands in a direct continuity with the people of Israel, and it has the same holy calling. And when God said through Moses, “You shall not do as they do,” Jesus says to His disciples, “Do not be like them.” It is exactly the same. Now all of us know very well this pressure upon us to conform, to let the world “squeeze us into its (mould),” which you may know is J.B. Phillips’ translation of Romans 12:2. But in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus issues this clarion call to be different. Just let me pick out a few verses in chapter 6 so you’ll see what a recurrent theme it is. Verse 3, “But you when you give alms, you are not to be like the hypocrites.” Perhaps I should take verses 2–3 together. “Don’t do what the hypocrites do, but you when you give alms, you are to be different.” Again verses 5–6, “When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, but (verse 6) when you pray, you are to do something different. Verses 16–17, When you fast, you are not to be like the hypocrites, but when you fast, (verse 17)
you are to be different. Or jump on to verses 32–33, “The Gentiles seek all these things. They are preoccupied with food and drink and clothing and material necessities. But (verse 33) as for you, you are to be different. You are to have a different ambition. You are not to be absorbed simply in material things but to seek first the kingdom of God and the righteousness of God.” But you, you see, comes again and again. But you, —other people around you are behaving like this, but you are to be different.

Now already in chapter 5 of Matthew, this call to be different is sounded forth. We saw how in verse 20 of chapter 5 our righteousness is to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. There is their kind of righteousness: —external, formal, minimal, reductionist. But as for you, your righteousness is to be different. It’s to exceed theirs. We had it again at the very end of our session last week in verse 47. “If you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Don’t even pagans do that? They, pagans, love pagans. They do good to those who do good to them. They salute those who salute them. That’s their standard. But if you only do that, you are not doing more than others. But you are called to do more than others, to be different from them. So we have higher standards of righteousness than the Pharisees and higher standards of love than the pagans.

That’s an introduction. Now in Matthew 6, Jesus enlarges on this Christian calling to be different. And he does so in this chapter if I may try and sum it up, although it’s not a very satisfactory way to do it; but I’m going to put it like this, in both our religious life and in our secular life. And verses 1–18 concern our religious life while verses 19–34 concern our secular life. I recognize at once that this distinction is a misleading distinction, because Christians cannot separate these into watertight compartments. And everything we do, if we are Christian, is “religious” in the sense that it is done in God’s presence, according to God’s will, for God’s glory. And indeed, the divorce of the secular from the sacred has been positively disastrous in the whole history of Christendom so that even the most secular things a Christian does are sacred things in the sense that they are done as a Christian in God’s presence and for His glory.

Nevertheless, I think a certain distinction between these two realms remains. But what I mean by our “religious” life is religious practices like almsgiving, praying, and fasting, which are the three examples our Lord gives in these paragraphs. By our “secular” life, I mean earning our living in the world and seeing to our material necessities like food, drink, and clothing. So here are two spheres, if you like, of our Christian living. Now the point is that in both spheres, the call of Jesus to His disciples is to be
different from everybody else. Thus, we are to be different from the hypocrisy of religious people, the Pharisees. And we are to be different from the materialism of irreligious people; that is, the pagans. I will enlarge on that. In our religious life, we are not to be like the hypocrites. We have seen that already. Our ambition is to be to glorify God and not to glorify ourselves. And as we'll see next week, in prayer we're not to be like pagans either, purely mechanical and mindless in their devotions. So our standards of religious observance are to be different from the hypocrite and the pagan.

In our secular life, we are not to be like non-Christian pagans either, for they are all the time fussed and bothered about what to eat and drink and wear. Material things obsess them and preoccupy them, but our preoccupation is something different. We set before ourselves as the supreme goods to which we devote our lives; not our food, our drink, our clothing, but God's kingdom and God's rule, God's righteousness. So then, in our religious life, we are to see God's glory, and in our secular life God's kingdom and righteousness. More simply still, if you want to find an integrated theme for the whole chapter, the non-Christian may be said to be self-centered, seeking his own glory in his religion, seeking his own security in his secular life; while the Christian is fundamentally God-centered. For his supreme concern, whether in the religious life or the secular life, is the name of God, the kingdom of God, the will of God, and the glory of God. He's a God-obsessed person. Well that's just a summary, an introduction of the whole of this chapter. Perhaps it will help us to look at the details and see how they fit in a little more easily.

So we come now to the practice of piety (vv. 1–6, 16–18) as I've already given you the text. Now let me pause with regard to these three practices: giving (vv. 2–4), praying (vv. 5–6), fasting (vv. 16–18) and remind you that these three practices were much emphasized by the Pharisees. The Pharisees were religious people, and every Pharisee, indeed, every godly Jew would 1) give money to the poor, which is almsgiving, 2) he would spend time in prayer, and 3) he would abstain from food for spiritual purposes. He would give, he would pray, he would fast. And the Lord Jesus Christ had no quarrel with any of these three practices or with all three of them together. Indeed, He evidently expected His followers to engage in the same religious practices. For you will note that He begins each section “when you give alms, when you pray,” and “when you fast” and not even if you do so. He assumed that we would. He took it for granted that the Christian life and the kingdom of God would include these things and that there would be no particular difference between Pharisees and Christians in the nature of their religious practices. They would
Indeed, when you come to think about these three practices a little bit more, I think it’s not far-fetched to see in them an expression of our three-fold Christian duty. For in almsgiving, you see to some extent our duty to our neighbor whom we love, whom we desire to serve, whose material necessities we may seek by almsgiving to relieve, and almsgiving shares our love for our neighbor. In prayer, we express our duty to God on whom we acknowledge our dependence for life, breath, and all things. And this is the meaning of prayer. It is an acknowledgment of dependence upon God. In fasting, we express to some extent our duty to ourselves in self-discipline and in self-control. Although we may fast not only to control ourselves, but also to give ourselves to prayer and maybe today out of solidarity with the undernourished peoples of the world. So then there was to be no difference between Pharisees and Christians in what they did; both would give, pray, and fast, but only in how and why they did it in their motivation and in the consequences of their practice. And this is the three-fold contrast that I want us to consider for the rest of our time. Jesus describes first, alternative forms or ways of practicing piety; Two, He gives alternative motives in the practice of piety; and third, He gives the alternative results or rewards.

Firstly then, the alternative forms of piety; —one is ostentatious, and the other is secret. Let’s look at the ostentatious. Jesus portrays in graphic and surely intentionally humorous detail the religious display of those first century Pharisees (v. 2). When the Pharisee gives alms, that is, when he makes a donation to charity, he blows a trumpet in order to draw attention to what he’s doing. And, as Spurgeon says in his commentary, “To stand with a penny in one hand and a trumpet in the other is the posture of hypocrisy.” Well, that was the stock-in-trade of the Pharisees, pennies and trumpets; one in the hand, the other to the lips blowing the trumpet to draw attention to what he’s giving in order to be praised by men. But this is his ostentation. Verse 5: When he prays, he chooses a conspicuous place either in the synagogue or at a street corner. He’s an exhibitionist in prayer. And (v. 16) when he fasts, he disfigures his face. He makes himself dirty and disheveled. He perhaps smears himself with ashes. He may put on sackcloth as well so as to look pale through his austerity diet. And he contrives to draw a long face and look dismal into the bargain.

Now it’s quite easy to poke fun at those Jewish Pharisees, but our Christian phariseeism is not so funny. And we may not blow our own trumpet, as the expression is, but we do like to see our name on a subscription list. And we may not pray on street corners, but we like to gain a reputation for our discipline and prayer. We may
not put on sackcloth and ashes, but if we ever do fast, we certainly want to make sure that everybody else knows about it. And this is ostentation in devotion. And there is pharisaic piety, but the alternative (Christian piety) is secret. And this is the emphatic word of the whole section. The word secret is repeated six times. We look back to verses 3–4, “When you give alms,...do it secretly so that your alms may be in secret” (v. 4). And Jesus goes further than that. He says not only are we not to tell other people about the extent of our Christian giving, but (v. 3) we’re not even to let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. That is to say, we’re not even to be self-conscious about it. But it’s possible to keep our giving secret from men while dwelling on it in our own mind in a spirit of self-congratulation. But the Christian is to keep his giving secret from others and even in a sense to keep it secret from himself. He’s not to gloat over it in self-righteousness. That’s giving.

Similarly, (v. 6) “When you pray, go into your room and shut the door.” Now this is not of course a prohibition of prayer meetings or prayer services as if there is never any place for corporate prayer. Because as another example of the balance of the Bible, you have in (v. 5) “When thou prayest.” The King James keeps the second person singular, although the modern versions of course say “When you pray.” But later on in verse. 9 He says, pray like this. “Our Father who art in heaven.” And you can’t, of course, say the Lord’s Prayer on your own, because it’s all in the plural. And it’s addressed to “Our Father,” and it assumes that the children of God are meeting together as a local family addressing their common Father together. So even here in the Sermon on the Mount, there is a place for secret prayer by oneself in one’s room. And there is a place for corporate prayer with other members of the family. But He’s speaking of private prayer. And He says when you have a time of private prayer, when thou prayest, then go into the room and shut the door. Shut it against interruption. Shut it against distraction, but shut it especially against all human spectators. There in privacy and secrecy pray to your Father. Jerusalem Bible puts it, I think, rather well “who is in that secret place.” The definite article is there:, not just “Pray to your Father in secret,” but in the secret place, for that is where your Father is when you come to pray to Him. And Calvin comments, “We ought to be satisfied with having God for our only witness.” So we shut the door against human spectators and pray to our Father who is in the secret place and is a spectator and an auditor and sees and listens to our prayers.

Then also fasting, (vv. 17–18) “When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face.” Now don’t imagine for a moment that Jesus is recommending His disciples to do anything unusual or
exceptional in exhorting them to wash their face and anoint their head or as J.B. Phillips puts it in more modern terms, “Brush your hair and wash your face.” That is, this is not a command to put hypocrisy into reverse. It is not a command to effect a grinning countenance instead of a dismal one. No, what Jesus is saying is behave just as you do normally. If you are deciding one day to have a fast day, let there be nothing different about you externally. Wash your face in the normal way. Shave, if you do shave. Don’t shave, if you don’t shave. Trim your beard if you do. Don’t if you don’t, etcetera. Just be normal. “Anoint your head and wash your face.” As Professor Tasker puts it in his commentary, “They were to share the same cheerful demeanor when fasting as they would when keeping a festival.” These, then, are the alternative forms of piety: the ostentatious and the secret. Ostentation is the stock-in-trade of Pharisees whether Jewish or Christian, but the true Christian form of piety is secret. In almsgiving, not a trumpet but even hiding what’s in the right hand from the left hand, keeping it secret even from yourself. In prayer, not a street corner but privacy with the door shut. And in fasting, the face not disfigured but washed so that no one would even suspect that you were fasting. A very challenging teaching, alternative forms of piety.

Now secondly, we have to look at the alternative motives in piety. Because behind the ostentatious piety of the Pharisee and the secret piety of the Christian, there lies a divergence in motivation. Take the Pharisee first. The motive of the Pharisee in the parade of his piety is to catch the attention and win the admiration of men, and the Pharisees were essentially men-pleasers. That’s brought out in every paragraph. Verse 1: “Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them.” Verse 2: “When you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men.” Verse 5: about prayer, “That they may be seen by men.” And 16 is about fasting, “That their fasting may be seen by men.” And the word that Jesus gave to this religious show is the word hypocrisy. And I hope all of us know that hypokrites, this Greek word, means an actor on the stage. The hypokrites was the man who plays a part who is not himself, who is pretending to be somebody else and assuming a role that is not strictly his own. He’s in disguise. He’s wearing a mask. He’s acting a fantasy. And the hypocrite in religion is just exactly this. He’s playing a game of religious “let’s pretend.” And he does it to be seen by men. And “to be seen” there is theatēnai, and however far you’ve got in your Greek, you’ll recognize in theatēnai our word theater. And this is exactly what he’s doing, giving a theatrical display (theatēnai) in order to be seen. It’s a theatrical display before an audience. But what the audience is seeing is not the real person. It’s just the religious showman, and it’s all done for applause.
Now let’s pause for a moment and see the tragedy of this. The tragedy can be put like this: giving, praying, and fasting, these three religious practices, simply cannot be treated in this way. Because these three are real activities, and they involve real people. And if we turn them into a pretense, we actually destroy them. Let’s think again. What is the purpose of these practices? Well the purpose of almsgiving is to alleviate the distress of the needy. The very word eleemosuné means mercy. It is to relieve somebody out of compassion. That is the meaning of the word. Again, the purpose of prayer is to enjoy communion with God. This is its whole purpose is to bring us into communion with God. The purpose of fasting is to discipline ourselves in order to give ourselves to prayer. But you see the hypocrite is not interested in the real purposes which these practices are intended to serve. He’s only interested in exploiting them for his own vanity. For his overriding passion is himself, and he seeks the praise of men only. To this, he’s prepared to subordinate his duty to God, his duty to others, and his own highest welfare.

Think of these three practices again. The hypocrite gives, not in order to benefit others, which is the whole purpose of giving, but in order to benefit himself. He prays, not to see God’s face, which is the great purpose of prayer, but in order to seek his own glory. Hefasts, not to discipline himself, but to display himself. He turns an act of self-discipline into an occasion for self-display. He actually, therefore, uses God and his fellow men, or practices intending to honor God and help his fellow men, in order to pander to his own conceit. Now when you see it like that, it’s hard to exaggerate the perversity of it. It’s turning religion and charity into an exhibitionist parade in order to boost our own ego. And as Dr. Lloyd-Jones rightly says, “Ultimately, our only reason for pleasing men around us is that we may please ourselves.” Because if we please them only that they may flatter us and praise us and boost our ego, so that the root of all this hypocrisy is self-pleasing, vanity.

We turn then from this horrible perversity of phariseeism to the Christian motivation. And if the motive of the Pharisee is selfish, the advancement of his own glory, the motive of the Christian is or should be godly, the advancement of the glory of God. Now to begin with, the Christian recognizes that giving, praying, and fasting are important in their own right. We’ve already seen that each has a purpose of its own. And in doing each of these things, we should seek to fulfill the purpose which this practice has. That is, we should give because we genuinely love people and desire to serve those in need by our giving whether it’s in missionary work, in philanthropic work, our own church, or whatever it is. It is concern for the people who are going to benefit from our giving.
It is for that reason that we give. We genuinely desire to serve by our giving. We should pray because we genuinely want to seek the face of God, and we should fast because we genuinely want to discipline ourselves in the service of God and men. And in a sense, we’ve got no need and should have no wish to look any further than this; because certainly the idea of using these beneficial practices to minister to our own vanity should be abhorrent to us.

And each of these three practices has its own rationale, its own reason, and it’s sufficient in itself. Nevertheless, there is something further to be said. And that is that, although each of these practices has a clearly-defined and well-understood purpose as we’ve seen; —giving in relation to others, praying in relation to God, fasting in relation to myself, yet the Christian relates all of them to God. In addition, because his duty to others and his duty to himself are part of his duty to God, indeed everything the Christian does as a Christian is done to please, to honor, and to glorify God. And, therefore, although he gives praise and fasts in secret so far as men are concerned, he does not do these things in secret so far as God is concerned. God sees them all. For the secret place in which he gives, the secret place in which he prays, the secret place in which he fasts, is in each place the secret place in which God dwells, —the secret place in which God sees and hears and knows. That’s the thrust of our Lord’s teaching. And the beautiful thing is this, that whereas to practice our piety before men is certain to degrade it. To practice our piety before God is equally certain to ennoble it. Everything we do in the conscious presence of God is purified and ennobled by that very fact, that we know God is watching and God is judging.

Indeed, the only way to ensure that anything we do is real, genuine, and authentic is to do it in the conscious presence of God. He and He alone is the guarantor of authenticity. Why is that? Well it’s partly because of who and what God is, but it is partly because this God sees. That’s the word again that comes again and again here. He sees not the outward appearance but the heart. Not the deed only, but we’re back, you see, in chapter 5: He sees the heart, the mind, the motive. There is this inwardness of Christian righteousness, piety, and morality. So to live and act in the presence of God ensures this reality, this honesty, this integrity that is so important in all our Christian living. Whereas to practice piety before men is to put on a charade.

Now at this point I want to allow myself a digression in case there’s a question that has arisen in your mind as it should have done knowing how alert and intelligent you all are. And that is, how is it that there is at least a verbal contrast between chapter 5, verse 16, which says “Let your light so shine before men, that
they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” and the repeated command in chapter 6, not to practice our piety before men in order “to be seen by them.” Is this a contradiction? Are we to live our Christian lives before men to be seen by them, or are we not? And I think the answer is not really too difficult. We have to say that the contradiction is only verbal, and there are three points that need to be made.

One, the two passages refer to different aspects of our Christian life. Our piety, which is not to be practiced before men to be seen by them, is giving, praying, fasting. Our light, which we are to allow to shine before men to be seen by them, is defined as good works. Now giving, praying, fasting can and should be secret, but good works of mercy like feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and caring for and nursing the sick, it cannot possibly be hidden from those who benefit from these services. You cannot do these things without the person who is benefiting from the service knowing who you are. Well, I mean you could wear a mask I suppose and hide your identity, but that would be a kind of hypocrisy in reverse. You can give in secret. You can pray, you can fast in secret, but you cannot actually do good works to other people without them knowing who you are. So that is the first point. There are different aspects of our Christian responsibility.

Secondly, the two verses are directed against different failures. It is the sin of cowardice which made Jesus say “let your light shine before men.” He was telling them not to hide their light under a bucket lest you should be motivated by cowardice and fear to do that. That’s a sin of cowardice. But it’s a sin of vanity which made Him say, “Don’t practice your piety before men to be seen by them.” A.B. Bruce in The Expositor’s Greek Testament says, rather, He’s rather a dab hand at epigrams is A.B. Bruce, and I think this is a good one. He says, “We are to show when tempted to hide and to hide when tempted to show.” It’s really very good. That just sums it up.

Now the third point to make is this: that despite these two differences that I pointed out, the ultimate end of both verses is the same, which is the glory of God. Why must our piety be secret? Answer: in order that the glory may be given to God and not to men. Why are we to let our light shine that our good works may be public? Answer: in order that men may glorify our Father who is in heaven. So the ultimate object of both our secret piety and our public works is the same. It is the glory of God.

So far, then that’s the end of the digression. So far we’ve considered 1) the alternative forms of piety, the ostentatious and the secret, 2) the alternative motives of piety, the glory of self and the glory of God.
of God, and that brings us thirdly to the alternative rewards for piety.

A) The Pharisee: what reward does the Pharisee get for his vain and ostentatious display? At first sight, the answer is none. Verse 1: “You will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.” But this means that he’ll get no reward from God. It doesn’t say he won’t get no reward at all. Actually, he will get a reward from men. He will get the reward he really wants, the reward which an actor wants when the play is over,; and that is applause. He will be applauded by men. He’s putting on a show. And when the charade is finished, he’ll be clapped. He’ll get the applause of men. That’s what he wants. That’s what he will get. But that’s all he will get. And once the applause has died down, Jesus says there is no further reward to come. And that is the thrust of the very solemn words repeated (v. 2) about those who give ostentatiously. “Truly, I say to you, they have their reward” or as we would say, they’ve had it. Verse 5: Don’t be like the hypocrites when you pray. “Truly, I say to you, they have their reward.” And again (v. 16) of those who fast ostentatiously, “Truly, I say to you, they have their reward.” Three times the same words are repeated. The New English Bible, “They have their reward already.” J.B. Phillips, “They have had all the reward they are going to get.”

Now I think it was Deissmann first in his Bible Studies, although it’s been repeated by a good many commentators since, that the verb for “they have their reward” [apechine] was used in the papyri in connection with a receipt. A receipt was [apochi] and apechine this word, was used when a payment was made and it was receipted. So Professor Tasker puts in his commentary that the word indicates that payment has been made in full. I think then we can feel the irony of our Lord’s warning that if we give, pray, or fast to win the applause of men, we shall get it, but nothing more. We shall have had our receipt. This applause will be a kind of receipt to tell us that nothing further is due to us,—no further reward except judgment on the last day.

What about the Christian reward? Well, since the Christian gives, prays, and fasts in secret, he neither expects nor receives a reward from men. They cannot reward him even if they want to, because they don’t know what he’s done. He’s done it all in secret. He’s been a secret giver and a secret prayer and a secret faster, so he won’t get any applause from men. But our heavenly Father who
sees in secret will reward him, period. No, not openly. That adverb that you will find in the King James Version is a gloss, and it does not belong to the best manuscripts. The contrast is not between a secret act and a public reward. The contrast is between the men who neither see nor reward and the God who does both. That is, he is doing these things in secret so men don’t see and men won’t reward. But God sees him in the secret place, and God will reward him.

Now some Christians recoil from this. Some of them declare in their super-pious way that they have no wish for any reward. Thank you very much. It’s very kind of Jesus to think of it. They love to pray in secret and to give and to fast, and they wouldn’t want any recognition of any kind. And they dismiss this sentence. But I hope you’ll agree with me that Christian disciples are not at liberty to treat the teaching of their Lord and Master in this high-handed way. And if Jesus said it, He meant it. And we must not presume to contradict what Jesus our Lord said. And when you stop to think about it, the difficulty really has arisen in Christian minds or breasts partly because of the gloss of the adverb openly. We expect, like myself at least, I mean I was brought up on the King James Version and I have known this so well: “He will reward you openly.” And this is something that we have known from childhood. And it makes us think of prize-giving at college or school, and everybody clapping, you know. As you go up to get your prize, you are openly rewarded for your industry, etcetera. That’s what we tend to think about. That I think is part of the reason we recoil from it. It’s the adverb openly. And partly because the word reward to us means a pat on the back or a silver cup on the mantelpiece. And we find it very difficult to imagine any other kinds of reward. And as so often, C.S. Lewis comes to our rescue. And in a sermon called “The Weight of Glory” in the book called Transposition and Other Addresses, he says there are rewards and rewards. And let me quote from him.

“There is the reward which has no natural connection with the things that you do to earn it and is quite foreign to the desires that ought to accompany these things. Thus, money is not the natural reward of love. That is why we call a man mercenary if he marries a woman for the sake of her money. But marriage is the proper reward for a real lover, and he is not mercenary in desiring it. Or again, a general who fights well in order to get a peerage” (C.S. Lewis writes in Britain of course) “in order to be promoted to the House of Lords is mercenary. But a general who fights for victory is not; victory being the proper reward of battle as marriage is the proper reward of love. The proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, they are the activity itself in consummation.” (As usual, beautifully thought out and
Well now, what do you think Jesus meant with the rewards he talked about as I come to an end? Well, there’s nothing in the context to suggest that the reward will be given in some future prize-giving. After all, the hypocrite gets his reward in the here and now. And I tend to think that the Christian’s reward is given in the here and now as well. May it not be an immediate and spiritual reward that is closely-related to the activities of giving, praying, and fasting. And what rich rewards God does give to those who are real and sincere and godly in the practice of their party? Thus, for example, we give secretly. We share with God alone the secret joy of seeing somebody’s need relieved or some mission’s work forwarded, and we learn the truth of the word of Jesus, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” It brings with it its own reward of joy.

We pray in the secret place, and rewards are immediately heaped upon us. There is no man to see or to know or to comment or to congratulate. But there is God in the secret place—ready to receive us, ready to welcome us, ready to refresh us with His presence, ready to renew our strength, ready to show His glory, ready to satisfy our hunger, quench our thirst. Are not those the natural rewards that you want when you come to pray?

Again, we fast in secret and are rewarded by gradually increasing self-control and by the joy, the peace, and the liberty, which are the fruits of self-control. Or you might be content to say in the ancient prayer, “We do not ask for any reward except that of knowing that we do God’s will.” And is that not a rich reward in itself?

So I recapitulate and conclude, here are alternative forms of piety, the ostentatious and the secret; alternative motives in piety, self-glorification and the glory of God, alternative rewards for piety, the applause of men and the blessing of God. And the great thrust of the whole passage is that in piety as in righteousness, in religious piety as in moral righteousness, Christian standards are different from pharisaic standards. And our righteousness is to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. Thank you, brethren.