

# "The Secret Life"

Matthew 6:1-6,16-21

## **Two Lives:**

Everyone's life can be divided into two compartments. One compartment consists of the things we have done and experienced that at least one other person knows about; we'll call this "The Public Life". The other compartment consists of those things which we have done and experienced that no one but God (and those intimately involved in the situation) knows about; we'll call this "The Secret Life"

If we were to look at our lives, what would we find in the "Public Compartment?" What would we find in the "Secret Compartment?"

For most of us, we would find that the Public Compartment is filled with not only our normal daily lives, but also our good deeds, our giving, our service, and our sacrifices. Meanwhile, the Secret Compartment contains things we are ashamed of....our failures and our sins.

## **Good Deeds: secretly or publicly? The balanced approach:**

Jesus says in *Matthew 6:2-4* that when we give to the needy, we should not announce it, "but when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

But in *Matthew 5:16* Jesus said, "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

So which is it? Should we do our good deeds in secret, or in public?

Some time ago, a woman in our children's homeschool group was pregnant. She found out that her baby was anencephalic, meaning that she would not have a formed brain. Babies with anencephaly do not live long after delivery. Some live days, most live hours. Faced with this news, she and her husband leaned upon Jesus and trusted in Him and carried their baby to term despite the fact that most medical professionals urge abortion for anencephalic babies. They had everything planned well in advance of the day of delivery. Their large extended family was there when Abigail was born and during her short 5 hours of life, everyone held her and loved her. They took pictures of her with every family member. One family member made a special hat for her to cover her head, which was open, due to the lack of a skull. During those five hours Abigail was loved more than many children are their entire lives. The whole hospital knew what was happening. Nurses from everywhere came to see the love being poured out on this little baby. Most could not hold back the tears. After she died, the family would not leave her alone. They held her and rocked her even after she had passed because of their love for her. While most parents do not even look at their anencephalic baby as she is aborted, they gazed at her and loved her. The nurses and doctors that day saw a light shining. They saw love and good deeds before their very eyes. And they knew it was because of God's love that this family could love so much.

Many of our good deeds will by their very nature be in a public forum. When we talk kindly to the clerk at the checkout line, we let our light shine. When we love a dying baby, we let our light shine. When we take a stand for what is right, we let our light shine.

But Jesus is telling us in Matthew 6 that we should also be intentionally doing our good deeds in secret. A balanced life of good deeds consists of deeds that are done before others by their very nature, and deeds that are done in secret by our design. When we intentionally decide to do a good deed completely in secret, we do so only for God's praise, not man's praise. When we do our acts of righteousness to be seen by others, we forfeit God's reward for man's fleeting and meaningless recognition.

## Jesus: our Great Example

With such an amazing healing and teaching ministry, it would be very hard to do a good deed in secret, yet that is exactly what our Lord did again and again. He purposely chose different occasions to do His healing in private.

In *Matthew 9:27-31* we read about two blind men that cried out to Jesus for mercy. Jesus took them indoors, away from the crowd and restored their sight. He then “warned them sternly, ‘See that no one knows about this.’” (*Matthew 9:30*)

In *Mark 7:31-37*, Jesus took a man who was deaf and could hardly talk and led him away from the crowd. He then healed him so that he could both hear and speak. “Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone.” (*Mark 7:36*)

In *Luke 8:40-56*, Jesus raised Jarius’ daughter from the dead. He took with Him only the girl’s parents, Peter, John and James. After raising her, “Her parents were astonished, but He ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.” (*Luke 8:56*)

Even Jesus thought it was important to take time to intentionally do His Good in private!

## Heavenly rewards and earthly rewards:

What’s at stake here is nothing less than our heavenly rewards! Jesus said that if we do our acts of righteousness before men to be seen, we will have no reward from our Father in heaven. Yet if we do our giving in secret, our Father will reward us.

Why would we want to trade an eternal, meaningful, heavenly reward from our Creator for a temporary, empty, earthly “reward” ?

Perhaps we do not truly believe that the heavenly reward is really that great.  
Perhaps we lack the patience required to wait on the heavenly reward.  
Perhaps we lack an eternal perspective—we have our minds fixed on today, rather than “The Day”

The Bible says that we have an inheritance in heaven that can never perish, spoil, or fade [*1 Peter 1:4*]  
But treasures on earth decay, or are taken away from us [*Matt 6:19*].

If we truly grasped the significance of our heavenly rewards, we might be less inclined to trade them in for temporary, earthly recognition.

I once pulled off of the interstate on our way to church one wintry Sunday for a stranded motorist. The driver had his pregnant wife with him and a baby. It was cold outside, and they had no heat. They were from out of town and had no cell phone. Apparently they had been stranded for quite a long time with no help. After examining his car, I could tell that his alternator was bad. I jump-started his car and followed him to a nearby hotel. There I paid for his room and made sure he would be able to get the car fixed. Later, after church, I checked in on the family, who were doing just fine. They thought I was an “angel” from heaven because I helped them.

If I had heeded Jesus’ words, I would have kept this good deed secret, because He said, “When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” [*Matt 6:3-4*]  
I could have done that good deed before just the couple and let my light shine before them [*Matt 5:16*], and then kept the matter to myself, thus storing treasure in heaven. But instead, I was so proud of myself that I told several people at church, my parents, and other friends. Oh! I made sure to not sound like I was bragging, because I was a “good” Christian! When someone would ask me how my morning was, I would say, “Well, we were running late to church because there was a pregnant couple stranded along the road....” Then I proceeded to tell them the whole “Tom glorifying” story, but making sure to inject praise to Jesus so that I wouldn’t appear too self-serving. At the time, I don’t think that I

consciously realized that I was doing this, but as I examine my motives in retrospect, it is hard to deny the pride that had crept in my heart over this good deed.

Jesus gave us the perfect prescription for having to struggle with pride, impure motives, and self-seeking behavior when He said, "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret." [Matt 6:3-4]

### **Sins: secretive or confessed?**

As we continue our exploration of "The Secret Life", we come to the subject of sin. We all have fallen short of God's glory and are guilty of sin [Romans 3:23], but the question is: Should our sins be secretive, or confessed?

Many times our natural instinct when we recognize as Christians that we have sinned, is to confess those sins to God. Quite often, however, it stops there. Perhaps we confess the same sin over and over again to the Lord and yet continue to struggle with its effects in our lives. In some (but certainly not all) cases, sin can lead to physical illness [1 Corinthians 11:29-30; Revelation 2:21-22; 2Chronicles 26:16-23]. To this James says, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." [James 5:16]

Regardless of the current consequences of our sin (whether or not we have a physical illness), it is certainly not desirable to hide our sins. The Bible says that "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." [Proverbs 28:13]. I believe that this confession is not only to God, but also before man. Many people came to be baptized by John the Baptist, and they also confessed their sins. [Matthew 3:6] In Nehemiah chapter 9, the Israelites gathered together to openly confess their sins.

In my own life, I have seen that when I confess my sins not only to God, but to my wife or a friend, that often times my repentance is even more genuine. I do not believe that we should tell everyone we know about every sin we have committed, but if we look at our secret life, what do we see? Is it filled to the brim with sin? Have we moved any sins from the "Secret compartment" to the "Public compartment"?

### **God will judge our secrets:**

What we do with our secret life has powerful significance. Romans 2:16 tells us that our judgment "will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares" [NIV]. I also like how the New Living Translation puts it: "The day will surely come when God, by Jesus Christ, will judge everyone's secret life. This is my message."

Let us not forget that God will open up our secret life and judge what He finds there. In fact, God says that there is nothing in our secret lives that will not ultimately be made public. Of course we shall be rewarded for our good deeds done in secret, but what about all the hidden sins? Will they be hidden forever? No. Jesus said, "There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs." [Luke 12:2-3]

### **Put "these words" into practice!**

What shall we do now? If we know that God tells us to do our good deeds in secret, and to confess our sins to one another and we don't do it, we are like the man who built his house upon sand. In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus tells us that those who actually put His words into practice are like the man who planned in advance for a storm by building his house upon a rock. Those who do not put His words into practice are like the man who did not plan for the storm, and built his house on sand. When the storm came, one man's house survived, the other did not.

Our family recently spent a week's vacation on a house boat on Lake Cumberland, Kentucky. After guiding the boat through the lake, we found a private cove to tie the boat along shore for the rest of the week. The boat needed to be secured to trees that grew along the shoreline instead of using anchors. I found one solid tree to tie to, but I needed another tree to secure the other side of the boat so that we would not pivot back and forth around the first tree. No other easily available tree was there except for a small, but healthy looking tree nearby, so I tied the other side of the boat to it. One day as we were eating lunch I noticed some rocking of the boat and decided to climb higher and tie down to another sturdy tree. It wasn't easy, but it did help stop the rocking of the boat. Little did I know that a major storm was forecasted to come through that night. After the sun set, the winds picked up, and it began to storm. The boat was tossed about by the winds and the smaller tree that I had originally tied down to was ripped from the ground. Trees all around us were tore down by the winds. Out on the lake we could see a boat that had lost her attachment to shore. They were driving around the shoreline desperately looking for a tree to tie down to, but because it was pitch black out, they were having a tough time. Eventually we lost sight of them as they drove down another cove. We called in on the radio to tell the marina about the boat, but they were too busy with containing all the storm damage that was affecting them. That night I learned what it really means to secure to a firm foundation well in advance of a storm. Had we not been firmly tied to multiple strong trees, we would have been tossed up against the shore, or perhaps we would have been driving at night, during a storm, desperately trying to find a firm foundation.

The Bible tells us that now is the time to tie down to a firm foundation. And Jesus says that the man who hears these words of His, including His teaching on giving in secret, and puts them into practice, will weather the Great Storm that is forecasted for all of us.