

# **THE NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE**

## **Studies in the Sermon on the Mount**

### **Part 26**

#### **“Magnificent Obsession”**

## **I. Introduction**

### **A. Source of Our Title**

1. Lloyd C. Douglas, who passed away in 1951, was a Lutheran Pastor who retired from the ministry at age 50 to begin a new career as a writer.

a. **He became a best-selling author, with books like The Robe, Dr. Hudson's Secret Journal, and The Big Fisherman.**

b. All of Douglas' stories contained themes found in the Bible.

2. But his most famous book was probably his first, “Magnificent Obsession”, published in 1929.

a. **The book was a runaway best-seller, and made into a movie twice, one in 1935 and a later version in 1954.**

3. Douglas said that the inspiration for the book “Magnificent Obsession” came from the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount that we will look at today. The message of the book has since inspired millions. Listen to what motivational speaker Bob Proctor had to say about it...

## **Video: Bob Proctor**

### **B. The Secret**

1. The story is about David Merrick, a spoiled, wealthy young man living a totally self-centered life. After having too much to drink, he causes a boating accident in which an elderly Doctor is killed.

a. The good Doctor Phillips died because the only medical equipment available was used to save him instead of the Doctor.

2. **This tragedy plunges the young man into a season of soul-searching** as to why he was spared while the good Doctor perished; he wonders how he can make amends, especially to the Doctor's widow, who he's in love with.

3. As he begins to seek to know more about the Doctor and why he was so well-loved, he discovers that the Doctor lived his life by rule of a great "secret".

#### **VIDEO: Here's the scene where the Doctor's friend shares the "secret"**

a. The "secret" of the good Doctor's life was his "magnificent obsession" to live his life doing good for others, and wherever possible, to do it in secret!

4. All this brings us around to our text today, the verse from the Sermon on the Mount, where Lloyd C. Douglas said he got the idea for the book!

**Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them;  
otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.**

**Matthew 6:1**

## **II. The Warning Label for Our Religious Life**

### **A. Do the Right Thing-For the Right Reason!**

1. As we launch out into Chapter 6 of this amazing Sermon on the Mount, we find it begins with a warning-do the right things; but be sure you are doing them for the right reason-to be seen of God rather than men.
2. We all think of the Christian life as doing good things; but here the Lord warns us to be sure we are doing the good things for the right reason.
3. He uses 3 areas of religious life as examples: giving, praying, and fasting:

#### **a. Giving**

**"When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. "But when you give alms, do not let 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 repay you.**

**Matthew 6:2-4**

#### **b. Praying**

**"And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.**

**Matthew 6:5-6**

#### **c. Fasting**

**"And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by**

**your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.**

**Matthew 6:16-18 NASB**

## **B. The Pattern**

1. Jesus uses the example of 3 righteous activities, (giving, praying and fasting), to stand for all our religious life.

a. He doesn't say "IF" you give, pray or fast' He says "WHEN" you give, pray or fast.

b. The Lord assumes we will do these things.

2. But He warns us that *when* we do these things, do not do them to be seen by men!

a. Here we have another example of how different the Christian is from the world.

b. A born-again person does good things for others to win approval from God; a worldly person will often do good things for others but they do them to win approval from men. If I do good things for others so they will think or speak well of me, or approve of me, in the end, I'm really doing it for myself!

**This is where we see the insidious character of sin. What appears to be so selfless may be just a very subtle form of selfishness. According to our Lord it comes to this: man by nature desires the praise of man more than the praise of God.**

**David Martyn Lloyd-Jones**

c. Preparing this message reminds me to check my heart about who I'm trying to please; God or man? And that pleasing man=pleasing self.

**"Ultimately our only reason for pleasing men around us is that we may please ourselves. Our real desire is not to please others as such; we want to please them because we know that, if we do, they will think better of us."**

## **David Martyn Lloyd-Jones**

3. So how can I be delivered from man-pleasing? The only safeguard for my soul, the only way I can be free of a man-pleasing spirit is to do as much of my religion as possible IN SECRET.

- a. When I give, whenever possible, I do it so I don't get the credit
- b. When I pray, I do it to be heard by God, not by men
- c. When I fast, I don't announce it or go around looking sad

4. The motivation for the magnificent obsession is that I receive my reward from God rather than men. If I do good things to be seen by men so they think well of me, that's all the reward I will get; but if I...

- a. Give in secret, the Father will reward me openly.
- b. Pray in secret, the Father will reward me openly
- c. Fast in secret, the Father will repay me

5. Not only are we not to seek the approval of men, we aren't even to seek approval of ourselves.

**"But when you give alms, do not let 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 repay you.**

**Matthew 6:4**

- a. The lesson here is not to keep accounts of our good deeds. We aren't to keep a ledger of what we do right; do good, secretly where possible, then forget it.
- b. If I keep a ledger of my good deeds, it's just another way of feeling good about myself; seeking self-approval above God-approval.
- c. Jesus tells us that God is keeping the books!

**And if you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers,  
you will surely be rewarded."**

**Matthew 10:42 NLT**

- d. Could “little ones” refer to those who are not able to repay you?
- 6. There is nothing wrong with seeking rewards; unless we are seeking them from men rather than God. or rewarded by God?

### **C. Let There Be No Confusion**

- 1. We need to make sure no one leaves here confused over what may appear to be 2 things Jesus said that might appear to contradict one another:

#### **2 Verses that Appear to Contradict**

**Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them;  
otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.**

**Matthew 6:1**

**Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and  
glorify your Father which is in heaven.**

**Matthew 5:16**

- a. At first glance, you might say, “OK, Lord, which is it?” But really there is no contradiction at all.

- 2. I am to live in such a way that others can see God is in my life. But I do my good deeds, as much as possible, only to be seen by God.

**“The Christian is to live in such a way that men looking at him, and seeing the quality of his life, will glorify God. He must always remember at the same time that he is not to do things in order that he may attract attention to himself. He must not desire to be seen of men, he is never to be self-conscious.**

**Clearly, this balance is delicate.”**

## **David Martyn Lloyd-Jones**

a. It's a question of motive: do I want men to see me or to see God?  
The great C.S. Lewis said it this way...

**“Don’t shine so others can see you. Shine so that through you, others can see Him.”**

### **III. Conclusion**

#### **A. Pay It Forward**

1. This verse about doing good in secret inspired another movie, **“Pay It Forward”**; the theme was “when someone does you a big favor, don’t pay it back, pay it forward”.

a. Twice in the last month someone paid my bill at the restaurant anonymously. Both times the waitress said they did not want to be known. I thought of this message. If I had known who they were, I would have thanked them. And that’s all the reward they’d get. But because they did it in secret, I know that God will reward them. And that’s a better deal!

#### **B. The Magnificent Obsession is Another Proof of Death to Self**

1. As each teaching in the Sermon unfolds, we continue to see once again that the normal Christian life is about death of the self.

2. Nothing is more natural to us than to want to be at the center; to be noticed; to be liked.

3. **The problem is that we can be like the Baptist deacon who was given a ribbon for being the most humble person in the church; but when he wore it, they took it away from him!**

4. Instead, the call is to be like Jesus. Let's seek to live a life that does good without looking for a reward from men. Let's remember...

**Nothing we have done will be forgotten, our smallest act will be remembered  
by God.**

**David Martyn Lloyd-Jones**