

## **Introduction**

I don't know about you but I thoroughly enjoy idioms and was glad to come across a list of the most popular ones. They include the following: (1) **"Put your money where your mouth is"**; (2) **"Not playing with a full deck"**; (3) **"That takes the cake"**; (4) **"Lose your shirt"**; (5) **"A dime a dozen"**; and (6) **"Don't toot your own horn."**

That last one is a fitting introduction to our text, Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18. In fact, most sources claim that the origin of the idiom **"Don't toot your own horn"** is Jesus' exhortation in verse 2, **"Do not sound a trumpet."** That's one idiom that we'd do well to live by and thus, what I'm going to preach about today.

## **Kingdom People and Good Deeds**

In verse 1, Jesus identifies a prevailing characteristic of kingdom. They practice what He calls **"righteousness."**

The subsequent verses, 2-18, define specifically to what the word **"righteousness"** here refers. It's good deeds (virtuous acts) that people generally admire and praise. Jesus mentions three of those that were especially esteemed by first century Jews: giving money to the poor (verses 2-4), praying (5-15), and fasting (verses 16-18). There are countless others of course. A retired Christian, for instance, does free home repairs for the elderly. That is a good deed.

Jesus reveals why kingdom people do good deeds in verse 3. He uses an analogy to do so - right and left hands not knowing what each is doing. Typing illustrates this. When I type, I'm not aware of my hands. I put them on the key board and they type automatically, without me thinking about where they are on the board and what they're doing.

That's the idea Jesus conveys here. Kingdom people do the good deeds they do because they are the people they are. They're so permeated with love for God and others that they do them naturally, automatically. They hardly notice they're doing them as a result, and

rarely remember they did. Their left hand, in other words, doesn't know what their right hand is doing.

Because it doesn't, they do their good deeds **"in secret,"** as Jesus says it in verses 4, 6, and 18. Because those deeds are natural expressions of what they are, they don't consider them anything special – **"big deals."** They do them, therefore, without regard to anyone watching and knowing. That isn't a concern of theirs, at all. It's utterly irrelevant to them. They don't toot their own horns in other words.

Michael Briggs, an Administrative Council member at Barberton Friends Church, came 40 minutes late to a meeting one night – his shirt and tie covered with grease and dirt. He apologized to us for his appearance but didn't explain it until I asked him about it later. He had stopped to help a motorist whose car had broken down, crawling under it to fix what needed fixed. But good deeds were so natural for him (he did things like that all the time) that he truly didn't understand all the fuss we made about how sacrificial and good what he did was.

He illustrates what kingdom people do. They practice righteousness in secret. They do good deeds naturally without tooting their own horns.

### **Hypocrites and Good Deeds**

What a contrast that is to those whom Jesus calls **"hypocrites."** He alone used that word in the New Testament and He used it seventeen times, three of those in verses 2, 5, and 16. The Greek word translated that connotes ones who practice deceit, which reveals what He teaches in using it. The good deeds of many are a sham. The goodness of their outer acts is inconsistent with the inner condition that motivates them.

Jesus identifies what that inner condition is. It's the intent to be **"noticed by men"** (verse 1), **"honored by men"** (verse 2), **"seen by men"** (verse 5), and again **"noticed by men"** (verse 16). No matter what their other intentions are, people are hypocrites when they do good deeds to get the admiration and praise of others.

Hunger for admiration and praise is inherent in human nature. It's

also pervasive and deep. We know that because of what hypocrites do. In verse 2, they sound a trumpet when they give alms for the poor at the temple. This humorous metaphor means they make sure people see them giving. In verse 5, they pray in public places so people will see and hear them. And in verse 16, they develop ways of disfiguring their faces and looking gloomy so people will know they're fasting.

Verses 2, 5, and 16 together reveal a defining characteristic of hypocrites. They're exhibitionists. Whether it's a good deed or anything else they think is laudable, they publicize it in order to be admired and praised. They make sure others notice and know what they're doing or did. They toot their own horns in other words.

Consider publicizing the names of contributors. Did you ever wonder why institutions put up plaques with the names of donors or why they name buildings after the donors who made them possible? One reason is to express gratitude, which is a good thing. But another reason, according to fund raisers, is that people are more likely to give if they know their names are going to be publicized.

Or consider what Dallas Willard called "**The bragging and exhibitionism that goes on around the rear end of automobiles.**" The license plates of a successful defense attorney, for instance, read "**NTGUILTY.**" Or the plates of a local pastor read "**THE REV.**" Or the bumper sticker of a runner reads "**I ran a marathon.**"

Or consider the use of titles. So a pastor always adds "**PhD**" after his name when he signs it. Or a denominational leader with a PhD. Degree requires his staff members to call him "**Doctor.**" Or some pastors insist on being called "**Reverend.**"

Plaques, license plates, bumper stickers, and titles just four of the countless ways that people toot their own horns. But they're enough to make the point. People are hypocrites when they do good deeds or anything else in order get the admiration and praise of others.

### **The Rewards of Good Deeds**

Those then are the two options before us when it comes to good deeds. We can do them in secret or to be noticed by men. How we do them is critical to us and Jesus teaches why. It's because how we do them determines the reward we get from them.

In verses 2, 5, and 16, Jesus addresses people who do good deeds to be noticed by men, "**They have their reward in full.**" The reward to which He's referring is the admiration and praise of others. Others usually will respect and laud them for what they've done. But notice the prepositional phrase "**in full.**" Jesus spells out the meaning of that in verse 1. They "**have no reward with their Father who is in heaven.**" The message is simple and clear. When we do things to get a reward from people, we get no reward at all from God.

There's a reason for that. It's because God rarely intrudes where He isn't wanted. When our aim is to get something from people, He steps aside like the gentleman He is and lets us get that. He responds to our expectations, and since what we expect is from people, that's exactly what He lets us have – what people can give, and nothing more.

Years ago, I was asked to speak at a Malone University chapel service. So I did. One of my aims was to impress my former professors there and get their praise. I did get a bit of that, but that's all I got. I didn't get anything from God. That illustrates what happens when we do good deeds to get the admiration and praise of others. We often get it, but that's all we get.

And it isn't much. Let's be thoughtful about this. We're rarely on people's minds. Unless they're mentally ill, they have lives of their own that occupy the energies of their bodies and minds far more than we do. They may give us fleeting thought here and there but that's about it. In the end, they don't give us nearly the thought we think they do. That makes the reward we get when we do good deeds to be noticed by men small indeed.

What a contrast to the reward we get when we do them "**in secret.**" That reward is found in verses 4 and 6, "**Your Father who sees in**

**secret will reward you.”** When we do good deeds **“in secret,”** invisible to the world, we’re brought into the flow of something that’s also secret – the presence of God and His kingdom at hand. That in turn does two things. First, it *transforms what we are*. When we do good deeds so people will notice, our ego swells and our soul shrivels. But when we do them in secret, our minds, hearts, souls, and bodies are energized and enriched. Second, being in the flow of God’s presence and kingdom *enhances what we do*. When we do good deeds so people will notice, we do them alone in our own power. They’re our project and God won’t intrude in them. But when we do them in secret, we do them with Him in His power, which enlarges our power.

I read about a pastor who, for years, preached for people’s approval, as many do. But he eventually came to his senses and began to preach for God’s approval alone. To assist him in that, he also decided to do what Jesus says in verses 16-18, fast in secret – in his case every Saturday before he preached. Two things happened as a result. First, he was transformed. His faith noticeably deepened, he said. Second, his preaching was enhanced. One day, the woman who ran the church’s tape ministry told him that orders for sermon tapes had doubled since January, shortly after he began preaching for God and fasting. **“I can’t explain it,”** she said, **“But whatever your doing, keep it up.”**

Those then are the rewards we get for doing good deeds. When we do them to be noticed, people admire and praise us, which means almost nothing. When we do them in secret, God transforms and enhances us, which means everything.

### **Let God Toot Our Horns**

You now know in detail what Jesus teaches in our text, and its challenge is clear. Don’t toot your own horn. Let God toot it for you.

Doing that is a matter of belief. Let me explain.

Many if not most of us believe the good things we are and do have to be advertised to be known. Suppose I sacrificially give a needy person

\$1000 to catch up on his rent. Or suppose I routinely fast two days a week. If I'm like most people, including many Christians, I assume those deeds of mine have to be advertised to be known. That explains why so many religious leaders, groups, and individuals spend so much time frantically tooting their own horns.

But they doing so shows a remarkable lack of substance and faith. I say that because of what Jesus teaches in verses 4, 6, and 18, "**Your Father sees.**" Every good thing that we are and do is seen – by Father God. He, the dominant reality of the universe, knows it. And He decides, in His infinite wisdom and knowledge, if and when it should be known by others. If it's best that it is, He makes it known. If it's best that it isn't, He doesn't make it known. It's as simple as that.

That's the truth and we need to believe it. To believe something means to act as if it's so. To believe what I just explained therefore means that we don't toot our own horns. We let God toot them for us.

Ronna Litchenberg wrote an article for *The Oprah Magazine* titled "Tooting Your Own Horn 101." She writes in it: "**As much as we wish other people would notice our talents and shower us with recognition, more often than not, it takes horn tooting to get someone's attention. Put your modesty aside and use these simple ways to start tooting your own horn.**" There are circumstances in which we should humbly make the good things we are and do known, in a job interview for instance. But those are the exceptions not the rule. The rule is we don't toot our own horns. We let God toot them for us. We put our public relations department in His hands. We let Him make the good things we are and do known, if and when they should be known.

## Conclusion

I found an article with a captivating title, "**Toot Your Own Horn without Sounding Off-Key,**" which leads me to a thought in closing. If we're disciples and friends of Jesus, we don't have to toot our own horns. God will toot them for us and it's always "**on-key**" when He does.