

For An Audience Of One

Matthew 6 v 1-18

Context:

Spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, fasting and giving, are vital if we are to grow as disciples of Jesus. However, what should our motivation and aim be as we practice these disciplines? This is a critical question for us to reflect on as we continue our journey through the season of Lent and in today's study we will explore what Jesus has to say about all this in a critical section of His Sermon on the Mount.

Observation:

1. What does Jesus warn us to be careful not to do and why in v 1?
2. What is the *first* practical example Jesus gives in v 2 of the acts of righteousness referred to in v 1?
3. What does he tell us *not* to do when we give to the needy and why (v 2)?
4. How *should* we give to the needy and why according to v 3-4?
5. What is the *second* practical example Jesus gives in v 5 of the acts of righteousness referred to in v 1?
6. What should we *not* do when we pray and why (v 5)?
7. What *should* we do when we pray and why (v 6)?
8. What further advice does Jesus give about prayer in v 7-8 and why?
9. How should we pray, according to Jesus (v 9-13)?
10. What does Jesus teach us about sin and forgiveness in v 14-15?
11. What is the third practical example Jesus gives in v 16 of the acts of righteousness referred to in v 1?
12. What should we *not* do when we fast (v 16)?
13. How *should* we fast and why according to v 17-18?

Meaning:

1. The phrase '*practice your righteousness*' in v 1 refers to religious acts or, what we might call today, spiritual disciplines. We will look at the three specific examples Jesus gives below, but as Jesus introduces the theme here in v 1, what do you think he means by a *reward in heaven* and why do you think he links our acts of righteousness with such a reward?
2. Read Matthew 5 v 16. Does this verse contradict 6 v 1? How can we square these two verses?
3. The first example is giving to the needy (v 2) – what do you think is the motivation and aim of those Jesus refers to in v 2 and in what sense have they received their reward in full? In what ways might we be guilty of doing something similar to them?
4. What does Jesus mean in v 3 and how might we actually put this into practice?
5. What will the Father's reward be if we give in this way (v 4)?

6. The second example is prayer (v 5) – What is the motivation and aim of those Jesus refers to in v 5 and what is the reward they receive in full?
7. How might we put Jesus' command in v 6 into practice and what is our reward for doing so?
8. Are you ever tempted to believe that whether God hears and responds to your prayers is dependent on the length and theological quality of them (v 7)? Why is this not the case and why do you think we still need to pray even though God already knows what we need before we ask (v 8)?
9. Why do you think Jesus gives us the prayer of v 9-13 as a model? Can you put this prayer into your own words?
10. Why do you think Jesus links God's willingness to forgive us to our willingness to forgive others (v 14-15)? Do you find this a challenge?
11. The final example is fasting (v 16) – what is the motivation and aim of those mentioned in v 16 and what reward do they receive in full?
12. How might we put Jesus' teaching in v 17-18 into practice and what is our reward if we do?

Application:

1. How would you sum up the main motivation and aim of practicing our spiritual disciplines as taught by Jesus in these verses?
2. The NT is absolutely clear that we are saved, not by our own acts of righteousness but by God's grace alone. How, therefore, do we understand Jesus' teaching here about doing our acts of righteousness for the heavenly reward we will receive?
3. Are there any changes to your spiritual life that God is calling you to make as a result of today's study?

Pray:

- For God's grace to practice righteousness with right motivation and aims.
- Thank God for the heavenly reward that is promised to those who obey Him.

Sermon Notes: