



Matthew 6:1-18 – True discipleship

Discussion Questions

Read Matthew 6:1

1. How would you define ‘acts of righteousness’?
2. Do you think there is any such thing as a completely pure motive in doing something?
3. How easy is to slip into the habit of doing things to impress others instead of doing them for God?
Why do we want to impress others?
4. If your motive is to be seen by others, Jesus warns ‘you will have no reward from your Father in heaven’. What does he mean? You won’t enter eternity? Or is it some other reward he means?
(Perhaps revisit this at the end.)

Read Matthew 6:2-4 (Giving)

5. Why is it so important to give in secret? What are some strategies you’ve used (or that Mark mentioned) to be able to do this?
6. Describe what goes on in your heart when and if you *do* receive praise from people. How do you react? How rewarding is that ultimately compared to pleasing God?

Read Matthew 6:5-8 (Prayer)

7. What is prayer? What do you find helpful in enabling your prayer life to flourish?
8. How can we ensure that we keep our prayer real, personal and not showy? Why is that important?

Read Matthew 6:16-18 (Fasting)

9. Have you ever fasted? Why do you think fasting is often ignored/neglected among Christians today?
 10. What are some of the reasons/uses for fasting? Would you consider it? Who should know when we fast?
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11. We are all probably hypocrites in some way (even small ways) in our lives. How can we address this? How can we still be confident before God even though we are not perfect?
 12. Personally (and perhaps for home), think about the various “acts of righteousness” you engage in. Where do you most persistently or strongly experience the temptation “to be seen by others”? What does that look like? Is there a particular person or group you especially desire to be seen by?

Date: 2-3 November 2019
Services: all
Series: We exist to glorify God by making disciples
Title: True discipleship
Passage: Matthew 6:1-15
Outline:

1. Generosity
 2. Prayer
 3. Fasting
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We are spending some weeks looking at the tag line of our 2020 Vision – that we exist to glorify God by making disciples.

I have LOVED Kevin Simington's sermons from the first three weeks of the series

Sermon 1 – that being a disciple of Jesus is very much like being a disciple of Jesus (or anyone) in the 1st century. Do you recall? It involves absolute commitment, sacrifice – leaving everything else as second in your life; in involves emulation – becoming like your rabbi – in our case – becoming more like Jesus... and submission (in our case) to Jesus' authority.

The 2nd talk was 'why make disciples' – that is – why are we in the disciple-making business? Why is it important that other people become Jesus' disciples? Why not leave people where they are...? And we saw that we long to see other people become disciples because without Jesus, they are dead... they are the walking dead... and we long for people to come alive in Christ... and be rescued from an eternity without Jesus!

Last week – who makes disciples? – and we saw that it is ONLY by the grace of God and his miraculous work in drawing people to himself that people become disciples of Jesus... AND that wonderfully – God most often uses people like you and me in that process as we share with them the best news ever of God's loving invitation to them to find forgiveness and rescue...!

Now – due to the triathlon this weekend, I wasn't going to include today's sermon as part of the series... but the more I thought about what I wanted to do... the more I saw that it can indeed be part of the series... because I want to look with you at that passage just read from Matthew 6 about keeping it real as disciples... and not doing stuff just to be seen and recognised and applauded by other people – but doing stuff as you follow Jesus ONLY for the glory of God and to point people to him! //

Someone said – 'there's no such thing as a pure motive'.

True?

Right now – I'm terribly conflicted.

You see – I want this to be a good sermon.

But do I want it to be a good sermon so you understand the passage, are helped to see what it means for you, so that God uses it to transform your life and you grow to be more the person God wants you to be?

...or do I want it to be a good sermon, so you think – 'gee – he's a good preacher'?

Well – it's both... I'm conflicted... sinful... I crave human approval; I know there's a lot that I do **SO THAT** other people notice... – but I also have a heart for the lost and a heart for the church....

Mixed motives...

...we want to be seen as more **knowledgeable**... or more **godly**... or more **generous** or more.... or more **prayerful**... or more **trusting**...

(or maybe I'm revealing too much of myself!)

But the message of this passage is clear... play only to an audience of one!

Flowing straight on after Jesus' plea for perfection, he brilliantly cuts right to the heart of our imperfections!!

have a look with me at v1 – *'Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do you will have no reward from your Father in heaven'.*

'acts of righteousness' = good works, good deeds, acts of kindness... or anything you do as a believer – worship, prayer, any ministry you have... serving, cleaning, teaching, making morning tea...

Don't do **anything** simply for the **recognition** of **others**.

Don't **give**, don't **serve**, don't **pray**, don't **help**, don't read the **Bible**, don't **preach**...! don't **visit**, don't do **Sunday School**, don't lead **youth group**, don't **clean**, don't arrange **flowers**, don't **welcome**... don't do **anything**... // to be **noticed**!! //

Now – people may *end up* thinking these and **other** things about you – but – that must **never** be your **motivation**! //

You may want to scream out to me tonight/ this morning – MARK – THAT's **NEVER** my motivation!!...

In which case – I say – **fantastic** – I'm **SO** thankful to God for you – you're my **model** and **example**...! **Please** have a snooze and we'll let you know when the sermon's **over**.... //

Following his introductory statement of v1 – Jesus goes on to give **three case studies**.

And the three specific examples he takes up are

1. **Giving**
2. **Prayer**
3. **Fasting**

So – we'll spend a little time on each of those this morning.

1. **Giving**

Have a look with me at v2

so when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

The principle is **simple**. **Don't** be **generous** for the **recognition** you'll get for others for being **generous**.

Jesus uses hyperbole here as he does throughout the Sermon on the Mount – remember – *if your right-hand cause you to sin, cut it off* – he doesn't mean that literally – it's a rhetorical device...!

Here the **exaggeration** is clear – no one **actually** used **trumpets** to announce their giving....

But there were (and are) plenty of people who gave to be **noticed**.

Your old school might have a foundation and you can be a member or *associate* member or a just a *friend* of the foundation on the basis of what you give. You can walk into the foyer and see your name inscribed in gold letters because you had been a generous benefactor.

Or there might be a plaque on a wall; a list of names on a web site; there might in an inner circle of people who have earned their place there because they give above a certain amount.

Giving to be **seen. Noticed. Trumpeted. Applauded. Honoured.**

And their **reward** // – they've been **noticed. Trumpeted. Applauded. Honoured.**

Paid in **full!** //

Don't give to be **noticed!**

Don't give, so someone will think **well** of you.

Don't give for the **kudos**, the **honour**, the name up on the **wall**... Don't give to win some other **favour**; to get something in **return**... Don't give just so you can call the shots on how the money is **used**... /

As a **follower** of **Jesus**... as someone who **hungers** and thirsts for **righteousness**...as someone who has a pure heart – whose righteousness surpasses that of the **Pharisee**... *our* giving is to be of entirely **different nature**

*v3 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.*

again there is **hyperbole here – exaggeration** to make the **point**... I'm not sure if you've ever tried it – but it's actually impossible to give in such a way that your **right** hand doesn't know what the **left** is doing...

It's not possible to write cheques or transfer money on the internet with your **eyes closed!**

But the principle is – don't give, to show **off**. Don't **give**, to draw **attention** to yourself. As far as is possible, give in **secret** so **no one** else **knows**.

Church? Internet... only the treasurer will ever see. Envelopes – no-one will ever see!

Organisation – web site – asks if you want to have your name published – tick '**no**'.

Giving to your old school – write – “by request – **no public acknowledgement**...”

And don't make an **anonymous** gift and then dwell on it in **self-congratulation!** //

what reward will the Father give when he sees what is done in secret? And is this just **another** vanity – exchanging the desire of a reward from **other** people with the desire of a reward from **God**? Isn't this also **mercenary**? Shouldn't we give just for the sake of **giving**?

Jesus doesn't spell it out. And it's all about **motive**... it doesn't say give **SO THAT** you'll be **rewarded**... but simply that a reward will **follow**.

But there are rewards that are appropriate... such as the **joy** of seeing the impact of **helping** the **poor**; the joy of knowing you've made a **difference**; the joy of **obedience**; the joy of discovering it **IS** more **blessed** to **give** than to **receive!** /

I shared with the anonymous donor of the generous gifts which funded Simon's stipend and allowances, the annual reports recording all Simon is doing... he wrote back with obvious delight that God was at work here in and through the children's ministry.

Friends – give **generously** – not for the honour which others will **afford** you; not for **self congratulation...** but for the joy of knowing you can make a **world** of **difference** – both **now**; and for **eternity**.

2. Prayer

Have a look with me at v5

and when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full...

Notice that they **love** to **pray**!!

...but it's just not **prayer** they actually love... nor the **God** they're supposedly **praying** to...!

No, they love **themselves** and the opportunity which public praying gives to **show off**!

But their aim is neither **prayer**, nor the **glory** of **God** or the **doing** of his **will**; their aim is to be *seen*...

Want they **really** want is not an **answer** from God but the **applause** of the crowd.

AND – that's what they got! //

it's like people who pray in prayer gatherings today (not that I've seen in **this** church) but who pray only to show off what they consider to be they're considerable **skills** in **praying**... or their knowledge of the **Scripture** as they **pray**; or their **boldness** in **praying**...

don't **ever** pray to **impress**. To attract **attention** to yourself. To show **off**. To be **noticed**.

how are we to pray?

v6 when **YOU** pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father (NOT – 'so that' your Father) – 'then' your Father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

[Explain] Now this is not a rule against **prayer** meetings or every **public** prayer – otherwise we wouldn't **have** prayer meetings nor pray together in church!

Again Jesus is **overstating** the point to make the **point**!

There is of course one sense in which **private prayer** is **so** important...

And I trust you do have a **time** and a **place** where you regularly **closet** yourself away and come before God in **prayer**. (Again – not literal... I don't usually open my wardrobe... and there is Susan sitting among the clothes, praying!)

But – prayer when it's just **you** and **God**.

No **distractions**. No **audience**. No **pretence**.

No **TV**. No **electronic devices**. No **phone**.

For he sees the **heart**. **Remember**? The one from whom no **secrets** are **hidden**. All **desires known**.

Unless you take time to pray like this – at the very least – you are missing out on what it means to express your **heart** to **God** and **commune** with him – at **worst** – if you’ve **NEVER** done this – perhaps it is that you don’t really **know** God yet – that you are not yet his **child**! //

can you imagine a good home, in which the child and the father never speak? Never have one on one time? Serious question mark over the relationship?

Or the good home in which the child only ever talks to the father when her friends are around? It’s nonsense.

friends – here’s the challenge – only pray with an audience of **one** in mind. Whether that’s regularly on your own or in the company of others.

Pray without **hypocrisy**. Without pouring **contempt** on the whole concept of **prayer**. Pray not so others think how **good** you are at this **prayer thing**; pray – not concerned with what **others** think at **all**... but talk to **God** and him **only** – with your **only** desire being – the **hallowing** of his **name**, the **coming** of his **kingdom** and the **doing** of his **will**.... the provision of your daily needs, the forgiveness of sin, the protection from evil and the glory of his name! //

And your **reward**? – the joy of **intimacy** with **God**... the **joy** of drawing closer... the joy of handing things **over**... the joy of leaving things **with** him.... the joy of **honouring** him.

3. Fasting

Have a look with me at v16

when you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting..

note Jesus says ‘when you fast’ – assuming his disciples **will** fast from time to time.

I’m not sure if it’s a practise you’ve ever adopted... but many Christians emphasise prayer and giving... but we tend to overlook any thought of **fasting**...

In the scriptures it is associated with **self-denial** and self **discipline** and often with penitence for sin... with **humbling** yourself before **God**...

Daniel sought God with **prayer** and **fasting** (Dan 9:2, 10:2)

Saul – Paul – after his **conversion** had nothing to eat or drink for **three days**... (Acts 9:9)

Prayer and fasting are often coupled in Scripture... when we need to seek God for particular **direction** or **intervention**... see Acts 13:1-3; 14:23

But the command is **clear** – like **giving** and **praying** – it’s not to be done so that people **notice**!

In fact – v17 - you’re to do the opposite – you’re to **hide** or **disguise** the fact that you are **fasting**.

so can you imagine me on a fast... and making myself look tired and drawn out – maybe some powder on my face to make me look pale or grey... and dragging myself around as if I had no energy – just so when someone asks ‘are you OK?’ – I can say – “I’ll be fine... It’s just that I’ve been fasting for days...!”

No – I’m to take extra care that **no one** can notice – get out Susan’s **foundation** – make sure my cheeks look extra **rosy**.. !!!

Jesus exaggerates to make the point – on both sides... in his telling what the hypocrites did *and* his instructions to his **disciples**.

... but the teaching is absolutely **clear**. // Fasting is between **you** and **God**... how **ironic** that a sign of **penitence** or **humbling** or special **beseeking** could be twisted into something so full of **pride** and **self-promotion**! //

When **you** **next** fast... (sorrow for sin, seeking particular wisdom, or to allow more time for prayer...)... it's **just** to be between **you** and **God**!

friends – Jesus gave just three examples of this principle...

The principle – play only to an audience of one.

Don't do **anything** as a believer to be noticed... well thought... recognised... loved or adored....

To **everything** – to the glory of God – for **his eyes only**

For only how **God** sees us / **matters**.

Don't **give**, don't **pray**, don't **fast** so people think you're just so **wonderful**...

Don't **serve**... don't teach **RI**, don't help in **Sunday School**, serve **morning tea**; lead **home group**, serve on **parish council**; **clean, tidy, sing, play**, help with technology... help with **youth group**... **anything – nothing – to impress**... to **win** the **applause** or **affection** or **respect** of **others**....!

For if you **do**... you will have **no reward** from your **Father** in **heaven**. //

Rather: **Love, help, give, pray, fast, serve, play, sing, collect, count, arrange, arrange, organise, visit, lead, teach, cook, drive**... all for the glory of **One** – all for the glory of God **alone**... who will abundantly **bless** you with the **peace** that comes from a **pure** heart... with the **joy** of **serving him**... with the **satisfaction** that you're not in this for **you**... but only for the honour of serving him // **alone**.

And to God **alone**... be the **glory**!

Either being a disciple is something **real**... or it's something **else altogether**...

Which is it for **you**??