



MONDAY 10 OCTOBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 6:1-4

Plug In...

The “acts of righteousness” are three well-known Jewish actions that accompanied their faith: giving to the poor, praying, fasting. Giving to the poor was to characterise the people of God (Deuteronomy 15:4). It follows the heart of God (Psalm 10:14-18). Jesus, here exposes how the mere act of giving to the poor emerges from one of two places. Either, from a heart self-glorifying, or, from a heart bleeding mercy.

One hand not knowing the other is a comedic image to ratchet up the degree of secrecy. Such ridiculous level of secrecy needed conveys how mixed our motives can get.

Remember, Matthew 5:48, literally reads “you will be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”. Jesus gives a gospel promise, that it will be possible to be like God – the God, who a few verses before, is so merciful He provides sunshine and rain to the righteous and unrighteous alike.

Chew It Over...

How can you be part of making sure the poor and needy in the church are looked after? Review your recent offers to help and giving. Were there little things you did to put yourself on the stage? There may not have been an external trumpet sounded, but reflect on whether there was any internal music running (e.g., "I was pretty generous"). How can you do your next good actions without drawing attention to yourself? How can you deflect to God?

Prayer Suggestion

Pray that Jesus will capture your heart for passing on mercy – ask God to fulfil the promise of Matthew 5:48 in you. Pray against our pride and self-glorification. May we do our acts of righteousness for an audience of One.



TUESDAY 11 OCTOBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 6:5-8 (1 Kings 18:20-41)

Plug In...

Jesus taught that we need to do things which make sure prayer focusses in on communing with God as the activity. It is something Jesus himself practiced. See: Matthew 14:23; Luke 5:16; Mark 14:32-41.

Heavenly *Father* = God is gracious and merciful. Therefore, you don't need to do stuff to get His attention.

Heavenly Father = the Father is God. Therefore, many words are not needed; we are not informing the ignorant.

Chew It Over...

Martin Luther understood just how black our hearts can be. Luther said that our so-called 'righteous' behaviour can more dangerous than the so-called 'sinful' behaviour because we can do it in the name of our gravest sin: our self-glorification.

How disturbing is it that even prayer can be all about showing off. God does not listen to theatrical prayers. If that has been a dominant problem for you, then maybe you need to take a brief break from praying in public. To sort yourself out, Jesus offers great advice. Go back to praying privately to God alone.

When it comes to leading a public prayer (in a group, or at church, saying grace at a meal), here's some suggestions to avoid performance. Pray simple yet content-rich prayers. Pray simple lines that get straight to the point. Focus on something God has said about Himself. Say it a little slower so others can focus on what is said about God. Once you've prayed your point, finish the prayer. Prattling in circles probably suggests your more worried about how others are hearing it. Fewer words focuses it on God. Rest knowing God has heard your prayer. To know God already knows everything, relieves you of having to load up your prayer with lots of words and information as if somehow we are the ones to persuade Him or brief Him on the situation at hand.

Prayer Suggestion

Ask Jesus to help you consider further what you're doing in and with prayer. Thank God for the invitation and access He gives us to pray to Him about all things.



WEDNESDAY 12 OCTOBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 6:9-13

Plug In...

This prayer is all about asking God to bring in His Kingdom. From the Old Testament perspective, the kingdom arriving is the arrival of the Day of Salvation and Judgement as one moment in time. This prayer is asking for that Day to come, but asking that right now we can be included in the salvation through forgiveness.

Chew It Over...

Praying this kind of prayer should remind us of where history is going, where we are up to in God's plan. While we are urged elsewhere to pray about all things that concern us (e.g., Philippians 4:6), can it be said that dominating our prayers is the calling in of the Day of the Kingdom; the requesting of forgiveness for ourselves and the possession of the ability to forgive others? Make sure the concerns Jesus said should permeate our prayers colour our next communion with him.

Prayer Suggestion

The Lord's Prayer is remarkably succinct and simple, yet deep and rich in theological content. Meditate on each line. Allow each line to suffuse into your soul and pray them from there.



THURSDAY 13 OCTOBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 6:14-15

Plug In...

Stepping back to v.11 gives insight into vv.14-15. "Give us this day our daily bread" literally translates as "give us tomorrow's bread today". This could be reflecting on the manna given to the Israelites after their salvation prior to them arriving at the Promised Land. [Remember they collected the Sabbath day's bread the day before – Exodus 16:22-29.] The Israelites had been saved from death in Egypt to life in the Promised Land, the manna was life-sustaining until they got there. It was 'life' for them even now while travelling in the wilderness. It was life given now by God so they would survive and arrive at the end.

Chew It Over...

The Lord's Prayer is praying for the Kingdom. The prayer for 'bread' is not stepping out of kingdom requests for a brief moment so we might also include some generic needs. This too is a kingdom request. It requests that some of what belongs to tomorrow (i.e., the blessing of salvation) gets experienced today. Asking for our 'daily bread' is asking for the blessings of forgiveness. That which belongs to the future might be consumed now.

We do eat tomorrow's bread today. The test as to whether you have eaten of this bread is: are you engaging in forgiving others like God has forgiven you (vv.14-15)?

Prayer Suggestion

Thank you Lord for the assurance of forgiveness today. We look forward to being with you forever in Heaven. We praise you that right now we live without judgement over our head, we live with new life, the new life of Heaven turning up now. Help us to forgive others like you have forgiven us.



FRIDAY 14 OCTOBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 6:16-18

Plug In...

The only command to fast in the Old Testament is on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). Even there, it does not expressly say “fast”, but rather “afflict yourself”. This most likely means humble yourself in such a way to focus on your need for God and His provision of atonement. Jewish tradition indicates that the practice of fasting was one act they engaged in to help them focus and not become distracted.

The New Testament, likewise, doesn't command fasting. It does, however, assume some may be doing it in order to help them focus on God. Jesus addresses this common spiritual discipline occurring in his day. He interrogates, not the act but, the real motive – is it spiritual and therefore done so only God would know? Or, is it flashy and designed to make a splash?

Chew It Over...

Whatever spiritual disciplines you engage in, are there little tweaks you give it to headline to others? What words or actions do we subtly drop in to generate a little “wow” from others?

The theme of these passages has been that when acts are done publicly for praise then the payment you are after, you get – but that's it! The word 'reward' is a business term (lit. 'wages'). If we see these things as some kind of business transaction, then we will be paid in full. The implication is that there will be no more to expect on the Last Day – so look out. If you aim low, then low is what you get.

[NB: more on understanding the nature of 'rewards' tomorrow].

Prayer Suggestion

Praise God for being a Heavenly Father that does see what we do, even as we keep it secret, it is not in vain. The suffering, sacrifice, and cost in this life in order to follow Christ, our Heavenly Father rewards. Ask God for perseverance, generosity, consistency, integrity, privacy, confidentiality.



WEEKEND 15-16 OCTOBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 6:18

Plug In...

Today, a little thinking over the terminology of 'reward' used throughout the Sermon on the Mount, and much of Jesus' teaching.

'Reward' language feels at odds with the gospel message. Or maybe, as some argue, salvation is by grace alone, but there still exists degrees of status, or of bliss, that will be experienced in heaven.

Helpful, is Matthew 5:11-12. Here the 'reward' is a promise from Jesus that should one suffer in this life, don't fear, great is the reward in heaven to come. Notice the comparison is not between a greater or lesser reward, but between this horrible life and the great life to come. [The same comparison is evident with the pagans (6:7) having reward in this life (public praise), in contrast to the reward God hands out at the Kingdom (hence the prayer for the coming of the Kingdom, 6:9-13).]

The reward *is* the Kingdom of Heaven not varying levels once you arrive. Revelation 21:4 "*He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*" This truth clashes with ideas of degrees of reward in heaven. It is logically inconsistent to be aware of missing out on something yet be in heaven where there is no more sadness or regret. Heaven is perfection (Matthew 5:48), so how can one speak of degrees of perfection?

Chew It Over...

We live in a performance-based culture. Nothing's new. The Jewish world and the pagan world referenced in Matthew 6 was points for performance based. Jesus removed performance-based behaviour and persuade disciples to rely on relationship with their Father in Heaven – that is what assured them of the reward of heaven.

Think over how this truth should be counter-cultural? How does it affect you raising your kids? Working with employees? Do you run with a reward-based system, assigning lesser or greater worth? What can you do for your kids, your employees, that shows love and grace fostering instead an assurance of relationship within them and gratitude that inspires them to love back and work well?

Prayer Suggestion

Thank God that He deals with us asymmetrically. Although death and judgement comes to people be their works, the reward of life and heaven are given by God's grace. Ask that you are moved to living differently as the Spirit gives you gratitude over God's gift of reward.