KINGDOM *of* HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Matthew 6:1-18

(Sermon from Sunday 4 June 2023, Richard van Lieshout)

1. Information

a) Read the passage, perhaps twice using two different versions

b) Fill in any info that didn't make it into the sermon.

- There are no additional notes on this passage on anger in the CG guide.
- Following are some important additional notes for y'all.

- This week's passage is not complicated! The message is hard (as we're used to by now!), but it's not complicated.
- The structure is simple:
    - In v1 Jesus gives the basic principle.
    - In v2-18 Jesus gives three examples of what he means:
        i. Giving to the needy (v2-4)
        ii. Prayer (v5-15)
        iii. Fasting (v16-18)

- The basic message regards our motivations in pursuing righteousness.
- The Sermon on the Mount, up till now, has focused on what *Jesus* means by righteousness (which is a righteousness that goes way deeper than just the standard of the law).
- Now Jesus moves to our motivation for pursuing righteousness.
- He certainly wants us to pursue righteousness, ***but he also wants us to pursue righteousness for the right reasons***!

- In the sermon I spend some time on some unhealthy motivations (like fear & reward, two basic motivations for behaviour that even parents exploit!), but here Jesus focuses on the selfish motivation of doing right works 'in order to be seen by others'.

- Before even going into Jesus's three examples I'm sure that CG leaders could immediately take this principle and apply it to areas of current spirituality, like Church attendance, 'Quiet time' etc.

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- Following are some exegetical notes for the verses, most of which were not used in the sermon.

Exegetical notes on the text

V1:

- **It would be helpful to compare 6:1 with 5:16 (Salt & Light)**. Do these two sentences seem to contradict each other? How do they differ (note where the 'glory' goes in the two passages!)
- Two helpful quotes from scholars on this:
  - 'In 5:16 Jesus was concerned with the temptation to hide our discipleship in order to escape persecution (cf. 5:10-12), whereas in 6:1 he is concerned with our egotistical propensity to show off' (Turner)
  - '…it is right to do good works in such a way that when people see them they think of God; it is wrong to do good works in such a way that when people see them they think of us' (Bruner)

- '***Righteousness***'
  - Here means 'practical or functional godliness', ie obedience to god's laws. It is not referring to the (Pauline) concept of 'forensic' righteousness that is imputed through faith in Christ.
- '***Reward***'
  - The idea of 'reward' is something Christians struggle with. It seems that any spiritual pursuit, with any reward in mind, is in fact unspiritual. But all through the scriptures we are reminded of reward by the Father.
  - We are however, not told what it is, or when we get it (the ambiguity is intentional to keep us from pursuing our own imaginative rewards!), but we are told that God sees, and God rewards!
  - This is in fact a key theme in this passage, where the idea of God 'seeing' and 'rewarding' is present in the principle, and all three examples.
  - See also Matthew 5:12, 5:46, 16:27 and 25:21-29.

V2-4:

- '*When you give to the needy*'
  - As mentioned in the sermon, the practice of 'almsgiving' (charity, or giving to the needy) had massive spiritual weight at the time of Jesus, and would remain for Jews and Christians thereafter.
  - For interest, look at the story of Cornelius in **Acts 10, in particular v2 & v31**.
  - Jesus is clearly **not** against this practice, but he **is** against drawing attention to oneself in doing it!

- '*hypocrites*'
  - This word in Greek literally means 'actor, pretender, impersonator'
  - What was their key pretense here? Was it pretending to have a piety that they did not in fact possess? Or were they pretending to care for the poor when in fact they did not? Or both?
  - What kind of "hypocrisy" does he mean? On the one hand, there is that sort of hypocrisy that is evil and the person knows that it is evil. Many of the Pharisees were deliberately deceptive. But there is another kind of hypocrisy that is more subtle. In this case, "the hypocrite has talked himself into believing that at heart, he is conducting himself with the best interests of the needy in mind. He may thus be unaware of his own hypocrisy" (Carson). Perhaps Jesus has both sorts in mind!

V5-8:

- Jesus's reaching on prayer is centrepiece of this section, and perhaps sermon on the mount! It is more detailed than alms or fasting.
- Jesus gives two warnings of how **not** to pray, followed by a positive teaching, and a model prayer (aka 'The Lords prayer')

- '*When you pray'*

    - Problem is not praying! The problem is also not praying in public! Jesus prays publicly in Matthew 11. The issue is hypocrisy, not sincere public prayer

- '*Street corners*'
    - Prayer in the streets often occurred if a person planned it that way: at 9:00 a.m. when the morning burnt offering was made, again at mid-day when the afternoon sacrifice was offered, and at sunset when the Temple gates were closed. Loud trumpets were sounded from the Temple to signal the afternoon prayer. If a person timed it just right, the trumpet would call would find him/her on the busiest street corner in town, providing the individual with an excellent opportunity to parade his/her piety for all to see.

- '*Go into your room and shut the door*'
    - While this does not condemn public prayer, what must be taken note of is that public prayer does not replace private prayer.

- '*Heap up empty phrases..they will be heard for their many words*'
    - βαττολογέω - battologeō
        - 'To repeat the same things over and over, to use many idle words, to babble, prate. Some suppose the word derived from Battus, a king of Cyrene, who is said to have stuttered; others from Battus, an author of tedious and wordy poems'
        - 'Intentional repetition that mimics one who stutters'
        - Contrast Elijah's prayer in 1 Ki 18:26-29 with prophets of Baal
    - Here Gentiles are in view, not the hypocrite religious leaders
    - Eloquence and length are confused with effectiveness, as if God were ignorant and mans needs and reluctant to meet them.

- 'Y*our father knows what you need before you ask him*'
    - Keep it simple and ask for what you need!

V9-15:
- Then follows the example of the Lord's prayer, which differs from similar Jewish prayers at the time in simplicity and brevity, continuing the illustration.
- Note: we will look at these verses in detail next week!

V16-18:
- '*When you fast*'
    - The problem is not fasting!
    - The problem is not fasting with others (we fast together as a Church on the last Wednesday of the month!)
    - The problem is fasting to be seen by others

- '*Do not look gloomy..disfigure their faces'*
    - Literally make it known through facial expression!
    - Ie don't advertise your fasting

Sermon Outline

- On Sunday I simply followed the outline of the passage:
    - I spent most of the time on the principle, as outlined in v1
    - I then worked through the three examples of Giving, Prayer & Fasting (paying less attention to each as we went along, as some of the repeated ideas like 'reward' had been explained)

2. **Activation**

- As mentioned earlier, CG's can easily take the principle in v1 and expand it to other religious 'duties' today, and enquire with the group where our spirituality is more about being noticed by others, than done purely out of a desire to please God.

- I would suggest working through the text using the notes above, as it will automatically introduce questions and discussion, but being sure to stick to the basic principle of what 'hypocrisy' in a religious establishment means.

3. **Implementation**

- Be sure to end your session by outlining practical steps the group can take to practise this outlook in their lives in the week.