

Communion service.

Bible Passage – Matthew Chapter 6: v. 1-18.

Theme: Living out your Christian life from the heart.

“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. ² Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ³ But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

⁵ “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ⁶ But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.⁷ And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen *do*. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

⁸ “Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

⁹ In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as *it is* in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,

As we forgive our debtors.

¹³ And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

¹⁴ “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

¹⁶ “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ¹⁷ But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Introduction

So far in our studies on Matthew chapter 5 we have discovered that Jesus requires more righteousness than that which was displayed by the Religious leaders of the day.

These were the scribes who knew the Law of God and the Pharisees who were the Religious leaders.

These people appeared to be obeying God’s Law, and also their man-made laws. However they **did not obey from their hearts.**

There was always a **selfish motive** behind their apparent obedience.

We have discovered that no matter how hard we try to please the God of the Bible our creator, we will always fall short of His standard of 100% Holy living.

Last month we were challenged by Jesus because He said that murder and adultery began in the heart.

He said that thinking and desiring to do something, even without doing it, is as bad in God’s eyes as actually doing it.

We discovered that Jesus was the only perfect man, being God in human form.

He came to this world to **mend the broken relationship between man and God.**

He did this by paying the penalty for our sin.

Therefore, there is only **one way** that we can be **righteous in God’s eyes** and that is by putting our **faith and trust in Jesus**, as our Saviour and Lord.

In Chapter 6 Jesus is taking His sermon a step further and telling us that the perfection which the Heavenly Father of the Bible seeks, lies in the **internal purity of our motives.**

In the Jewish culture of this time there were three things that were judged by the scribes and Pharisees as being the most important deeds that proved your righteousness and obedience in following God.

These were in their **giving money to the poor (almsgiving), prayer, and fasting.**

Jesus is saying here that if these acts are merely **to win the approval of men,** then that is all they will achieve.

However, if these acts are done from a **pure heart in order to please our Heavenly Father,** they will be done, **mainly in secret,** or as hidden as possible.

These acts will be rewarded by our Heavenly Father who sees the things that we do in secret.

The emphasis of Jesus's sermon is constantly moving us **away from rules, towards relationship.**

Jesus is saying that the greater righteousness is seen in **purity of motive,** rather than **outward observance.**

We will notice this clearly as we go through Chapter 6 and 7 of Matthew's Gospel.

Today we will focus on the **three Jewish acts of serving God** and observe how these things must be done **from the heart** to please God and not man.

1. **Charitable Deeds** - (Matthew 6: v. 1-4.)

When Jesus was teaching this passage, there was a very unbiblical practice of giving to the poor. The Scribes and Pharisees taught that giving to the poor would act as a way to forgive people for their sins.

(Sirach 3:14,15,30 – Apocryphal book)

This type of teaching attracted people to give money to the poor and naturally they wanted other people to know about their giving.

The reward that these people received was twofold.

They thought that their sins would be forgiven because of their good works and also they were praised by other people and **felt good about themselves.**

This type of thinking is actually very prominent today.

Most people who are not Christians and give to Charity, expect that their giving will have **some credibility in Heaven with God.**

They also like to make known their gifts of Charity to others.

If you visit a large temple or shrine during the New Year period in Japan, you will discover that lots of individuals and companies will display how much money that they have given to the temple or the shrine.

They do this in the hope of getting favours from God during the year and praise from people as they walk past.

In the U.K. alone 9.6 billion pounds was donated to charity by individuals last year.

This is 1,390,896,000,000 Yen. This is a lot of money.

None of these U.K. gift givers would admit that there is a selfish motive behind their giving.

However in many of the cases if they were honest, they would think like the scribes and Pharisees in this passage.

They would **feel good about themselves** because of their charitable giving, and they would **hope that the God of Heaven would look kindly upon them for their good deeds.**

Because Jesus knows how the sinful heart operates, He **offers an alternative, more spiritual teaching on the subject of giving to charity.**

Jesus is saying that we must be **secret about our giving to charity.**

We must not announce our generosity to the public.

This principle also includes our tithes and offerings each week.

When we get our end of year bonus, or when we are in a position to give a large amount of money to O.I.C., then we must not put our name on the envelope, **it must be done in secret.**

In some countries like the U.K. and the U.S.A. there are tax advantages in giving.

Therefore, somebody in the Church needs to know about our giving in order to claim back the income tax. This is O.K. as it is for practical purposes.

God promises to reward our giving in His way and time.

We don't give to get a reward, but God knows about our giving and He will personally attend to our needs.

Philippians 4: v. 15-20

¹⁵ Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. ¹⁶ For even in Thessalonica you sent *aid* once and again for my necessities. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. ¹⁸ Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things *sent* from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. ²⁰ Now to our God and Father *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

Paul had the assurance that God would meet the needs of this Church **because they were sacrificial in their giving.**

So God promises us that there is **no reward from Him** if our charitable deeds are made known to others.

However, **God promises to reward us Himself if we keep our giving a secret.**

2. **Prayer** – (Matthew 6: v. 5-15)

Following Jesus's teaching on giving in secret, He now goes on to teach us that prayer should be done in secret too.

This teaching was in direct contrast to how the Jewish people prayed.

We are told that they prayed on the street corners and also in the synagogues.

They also used what the N.K.J. Bible translation calls "**vain- repetitions**".

Another way of describing this would be to say that their prayers were **focused upon themselves**, not being sincere, and **done to attract the attention of others.**

Jesus said that they already have their reward, which would have been praise from people.

After this Jesus then teaches His disciples **how to pray correctly in their secret place.**

1. **PRAISE** - We begin our prayers by expressing our love to God in Praise. We Praise God for who He is and what He has done for us. (Psalm 100: v. 4) The key to praising God is to make a list of **His character and qualities from the Bible.**

We also begin our prayer time, **thanking God for what He has done in our lives.**

2. **PURPOSE** – We commit ourselves to God's purpose and will for our lives. We need to pray for God's will to be done in our lives and in the lives of our church, family, friends, job, the country we live in. (Romans 12: v. 1-2)

3. **PROVISION** - We then ask God to provide for our needs. We need to be specific, so that we know when God has provided for them.

4. **PARDON** - We need to ask God to forgive us our sins. It is always good to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal every sin in our life, and to confess that sin specifically to God. (1 John 1: v. 9)

5. **PEOPLE** - Then we need to pray for other people, remembering that we also need to forgive them if they have hurt us or sinned against us.

6. **PROTECTION** - We must pray for spiritual protection from God. This is very important in Japan especially. There are lots of evil spirits and influences in the world. However, the blood of the Lord Jesus is the best protection for you if you have experienced God's wonderful salvation. (1 John 4:v. 4)

Jesus is not saying that all prayer must be done in secret.

Jesus is **judging the prayers of the Scribes and Pharisees** at that time.

Group prayer meetings are a good thing and there is great power and encouragement when God's people meet together for prayer.

In v. 14-15 Jesus teaches a very important principle which is linked to our private prayer time with God.

The teaching is about "**forgiveness**".

Jesus says very clearly that if we do not forgive people when they sin against us, then our Father in Heaven will not forgive us.

It is important that we understand what Jesus is saying here.

One commentator I read said this;

“Our attitude towards others is an indication of our attitude towards God.”

This person is absolutely right. If we don't forgive other people, then we harbour bitterness in our hearts and our lives do not reflect that of Jesus.

How can we then come to God in prayer with bitterness and un-forgiveness in our hearts and then ask God for forgiveness for our sins.

Forgiving people is more likely to open their hearts towards a forgiving God.

If we don't forgive people, we are in a sense **blocking the opportunity to demonstrate God's GRACE towards the other person.**

Just as there is great GRACE on the part of God when we are forgiven through Jesus, so our forgiveness is a great witness towards the Gospel Message.

Of course we cannot forgive people for their sins. Only God can do that through Jesus.

But we can release them from the **burden and guilt towards us personally.**

Saying that we forgive people both releases us and those people that we forgive.

3. **Fasting** – v. 16-18.

The third thing that Jesus challenges is concerning fasting.

The first thing we notice is the phrase **“When** you fast”.

It is clear that **“fasting”** was a regular part of Jewish life.

However, there was only one occasion every year that God called his people to fast.

This was on the **“Day of Atonement”**.

Lev. 16: v. 1-10 & v. 29.

Now the LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered *profane fire* before the LORD, and died; ² and the LORD said to Moses: “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at *just* any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which *ison* the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.

³ “Thus Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with *the blood of* a young bull as a sin offering, and *of* a ram as a burnt offering. ⁴ He shall put the holy linen tunic and the linen trousers on his body; he shall be girded with a linen sash, and with the linen turban he shall be attired.

These *are* holy garments. Therefore he shall wash his body in water, and put them on. ⁵ And he shall take from the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats as a sin offering, and one ram as a burnt offering.

⁶ “Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering, which *is* for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house. ⁷ He shall take the two goats and present them before the LORD *at* the door of the tabernacle of meeting. ⁸ Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat. ⁹ And Aaron shall bring the goat on which the LORD's lot fell, and offer it *as* a sin offering. ¹⁰ But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement upon it, *and* to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness.

²⁹ “*This* shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth *day* of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, *whether* a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you.

Although the word fasting is not actually used in many translations, it is generally accepted by Bible Scholars that **self-denial and affliction of the body** is a way of explaining fasting, without actually using the word.

It appears that the phrase is used to **emphasize that it was a very serious fast period.**

They were not allowed to do any work, they had to examine their souls.

The Bible teaches that we can fast at other times in order to determine God's will, in the case of choosing Elders, Acts 13: v.1-2 and also in serious situations in our lives, like sickness as seen in Psalm 35: v. 13.

Although today it is not wrong to fast, we must do our fasting in a private way.

If you are married, your wife or your husband would need to know.

Although fasting is difficult, it is a **very effective way of connecting with God on serious matters.**

About 20 years ago when I was a Pastor, living in London, a man who I knew quite well asked me if he could come down to London and fast at my home.

He had a particular problem to solve in his Christian life.

I didn't know what the problem was but invited him to come and stay with us and fast and pray.

He fasted for 4 days and only drank water. On the last day he said that Jesus spoke to him clearly about his problem and now he was at peace.

I didn't ask him what his problem was but he willingly shared it with me.

I share it with you today, in case it might help somebody.

My friend said that when he was a boy **his father used to strip him naked and beat him or belt him if he did anything wrong.**

In Scotland in the 60's when I went to school, physical punishment for even small wrong doings was normal and very common.

Teachers used to keep a large leather strap in their drawers and anybody who spoke in class while the teacher was teaching, would get the strap.

I got it once and it really hurt!

Today you would be arrested and charged by the police for a crime, but it was different then.

What was different for my friend was that he was stripped naked, which humiliated him, before he was punished.

My friend, although his father had now died, could not forgive his father for these times of punishment.

Even though my friend was a Christian, he knew that he should have forgiven his father.

However, after 4 days of fasting Jesus clearly spoke to him.

Jesus said to him that He was stripped naked and beaten, he also said that He hung on a cross, completely naked, and died a painful death for the sins of my friend.

With tears in his eyes he said, "**Now I can forgive my Father**".

This is a real story and it does give you a real example that fasting does work.

Maybe you have a problem to solve in your Christian life?

Perhaps private fasting will help you.

Now to get back to the main point of the teaching. When you do fast do it privately and only tell the people who need to know about your situation.

In v. 18 we are told that God will reward people who fast in secret.

My friend was rewarded with peace in his heart and the ability and grace to forgive his father. God will reward us too.

Conclusion & Application

The title of my sermon is "Living out the Christian life from your heart"

In order to do this, **you need Jesus living in your heart first.**

You also need to be willing to obey God's word as it is taught in the Bible.

We must do this even if our culture and customs are different and conflict with God's word.

When Jesus died on the cross, He took the punishment for our sins, and set us free from the bondage of Satan to follow Jesus.

There is great **GRACE** and **LOVE** and **LIBERTY** in having the God of the Bible as your heavenly father, Jesus as your Saviour, and the Holy Spirit as your helper and comforter.

Why not put your faith in Jesus today, if you haven't yet done this?