

***No 9 Keeping our giving out of the public eye Matthew 6:1 to 4***

Jesus is giving his disciples teaching that will help them understand their place in his kingdom and in their world. Apparently, Budweiser paid $75m dollars to be a sponsor of the World Cup. They were very ‘disappointed’ when sales were banned at the grounds. They wanted their gift to be noticed so people would buy lots of lager. What a contrast with Jesus’ teaching in this passage.

Jesus challenges the doing of ‘acts of righteousness’ in public. But many actions are done in public chiefly when we gather in church. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees are Jesus’ most likely target – they were known to perform religious acts to receive respect from their peers and the admiration of the people.

1. Is this a danger in our 21st century context? Without naming names is this something that you have observed?

How can we guard against such behaviour?

Clearly God is not impressed by such behaviour – ‘you will have no reward from your Father in heaven’. The notion that God rewards good behaviour and punishes bad behaviour is common in the OT. (see Deuteronomy 28). But Jesus warns that motive is more important that the activity itself.

1. When we do something which is seen by others how do we guard against doing it to enhance our reputation?

What safeguards should we take to ensure that we serve God because our hearts are full of gratitude to him?

Jesus goes on to illustrate his point with three examples of humble service

* Giving to the needy v 4 to 6
* Praying v 5 to 15
* Fasting v 16 to 18

Jesus is saying these acts are valuable in our development and God WILL reward these actions. The reward follows the central theme of the Sermon on the Mount namely a heart transformed by God’s righteousness in this life and final perfection in the life to come.

1. How do you get on with these three activities? Do you find them easy to practice?

Have you found other things that help you grow more Christ-like?

It is clear from biblical and other sources that giving to the needy was one of the pillars of religious life. Poverty was widespread particularly in the agricultural/rural part of the nation. The people of Israel took seriously the obligation to provide for the poor (Deut 15:11). At the time of Jesus the phrase, ‘to do mercy’ , was an expression of caring for the poor by giving alms.

1. Have we lost this in 21st century Britain?

Is this about the person begging in the street? Are we too worried that if we give money, it will feed a drug habit?

What other ways can we help poor people?

Are we too eager to judge them as people who are spongers or wasters?

Jesus cautionary words are that we should not give accompanied ‘by trumpets’. Our chief aim is to help people in need not to bring about our own self-aggrandisement. We might update it by saying that such a person wants to ‘blow their own trumpet’. Jesus described public givers as hypocrites (mask wearers) – Jesus is saying they are doing the right thing for the wrong reason.

1. Is this an easy trap to fall in to? – we want to be humble but a part of us would love our gift to be acknowledged.

Is the word ‘hypocrite’ a bit tough? – after all you are doing somebody a favour by supporting them.

Jesus then contrasts the way his disciples are to perform ‘acts of righteousness’. Secrecy is the key – nobody else should know you’ve done it – maybe not even the recipient. Your money wasn’t yours in the first place – it was a gift from God. It is important that God sees you giving a gift and also sees that your heart is glad to be helping others.

1. So much in our world is about displaying your good deeds. Sponsors of teams want their brand name all over the teams’ shirts.

Should the church ask people to give on a regular basis? – if so, how should such gifts be acknowledged? Should people expect to be thanked?

**REFLECTION**

**In these days of crisis, there are plenty of poor people around. The Bible teaches us that, if we are able, we should support those people whether in the UK or beyond.**

**Perhaps this is an appropriate time to review your giving and consider giving to those who need support.**