

Pleasing God not People

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Preacher: Andrew MacKenzie

[0 : 0 0] The Bible reading today is Matthew chapter 6 verses 1 to 8 and then 16 to 18 and that's on page 970 of the Pew Bibles.

! Matthew 6. Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them.

If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. 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 others.

Truly, I tell you, they have received the reward in full. 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. 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 others.

[1 : 1 0] Truly, I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father who is unseen.

Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like the pagans, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. And then from verse 16. When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others that they are fasting.

Truly, I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father who is unseen.

And your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. This is the word of the Lord. Well, a very good morning and welcome.

[2 : 2 0] Kids, this is your opportunity to come down to the front. There's going to be things to see. Grab a parent, bring them with you. Get a better view down here as we look at God's word together.

There is lots of space down here, so don't be shy at all. It would be really helpful if we could just stay off the stage in the stairs, and that way we won't trample on any hands or tiny feet, and we can all listen together.

Well, adults, as the kids come down, you'll find an outline of what we're going to look at together in your service sheets if you open that up. And do keep your Bibles open at page 970 together.

Well, kids, what we're going to do is we're going to pray and ask for God's help as we look at his word together just now. So let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you that through your word you speak to us.

And so we pray that as we look at your word together this morning, that we would all take one step forward in our relationship with you. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

[3 : 20] Well, I wonder if anybody knows the marshmallow test. There's a picture up on the screen. It's a test that some psychologists do with toddlers.

And what they do is they put a marshmallow on a plate in front of the toddler, and they go, hey, I'm going to leave the room. And if you don't eat that marshmallow while I'm gone, I'll give you 10 marshmallows or a treat you prefer more.

But if you do eat that marshmallow while nobody's watching, there will be no further reward for you. That marshmallow will be it. In fancy words, it's about delayed gratification.

It tests, can they wait for a better reward that they can't see when there's a reward that they'd quite like right in front of them? Everybody wants the marshmallow that's just sitting there who doesn't like marshmallows.

Will the instant reward tempt them away, erode the determination to wait for something better that they know is there, they trust is there because the adult who promised them it, they believe.

[4 : 25] Can they withstand the temptation of the marshmallow? And what Jesus is saying in our passage today, the one that we read, is that his followers, friends of Jesus, need to be careful to not fail the marshmallow test.

That's the nub of what's going on here. We've got some skeptical looks. Kids, are you on board? Don't fail the marshmallow test? Yeah? Great. Stick with it. We'll see. We've been in a short series in the mornings in here, in the Lord's Prayer, and we spent the last two weeks looking at what it says in the Lord's Prayer with Tim.

And this morning what we're doing is we're looking at the top and the tail, the things that Jesus says to his disciples right before and right after. So it's a bit like a Lord's Prayer sandwich, and we're looking at the two bits of bread this morning.

And the big headline verse for this morning, what Jesus says to his followers is to be careful. Verse one, Be careful not to practice your righteousness.

That is to do good things, to be seen in front of others, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

[5 : 37] Be careful not to choose the reward that you can see, but remember the better reward that is coming from the Father in heaven.

Be careful not to practice your righteousness or to do the good things that followers of Jesus do, just so that other people see you, and so that other people like you.

But do them for the Lord, because if you do, do them just for other people to see. And you take that immediate reward, that marshmallow that's staring you right in the face.

There will be no reward from the Father in heaven. That's what Jesus says. Don't try to please others. Just please the Father. And this morning, Jesus gives us three examples of what that looks like in people's lives.

So I've recruited the best team of actors that anyone could ever look for. We've got the crack squad right here, and we're going to have a look at three things. When people give to the needy, when people pray, and when they fast.

[6 : 40] And for all three, we're going to ask this big question this morning. It's up on the screens for you. Did they want God, or people, to see their good deed?

To see the good thing that they did? Well, up first, giving money to the poor. A good thing to do. Things that Jesus calls his followers to do.

Let's see how this person does it. Over to our actors. Hear ye, hear ye.

All eyes on me for the ceremonial giving of money to the poor. I present to you the most generous person you've ever met. Thank you for such an amazing introduction.

I have brought something with me today to give out of the goodness of my heart. To Callum, a check.

[7 : 56] Callum, I've heard that times have been tough. You've been struggling to feed your family. So here is a £30 check just for you.

If you take it to your local bank, you will get the money in about five working days. I hope that my generosity blesses you.

Thanks so much, Robert. That's very kind and, like you said, generous of you. I guess I need to go figure out how to get to my bank and what to do with this. Wow.

Now, that is a truly generous man. How lucky are we all that he chose to help Callum in a way that we all could see. Don't we all wish that we were as generous as Rob?

One more time for the most generous man you've ever met. Well, kids, what do you think?

[8 : 54] Remember this morning we're asking the big question. Did Rob want God or people to see him giving money to the poor?

That's our big question. Let's take a few seconds, have a think, chat to your neighbour and then we'll do a straw poll, okay? Let's see. Okay. Okay, let's see.

Let's do hands up, okay? Hands up if you thought Rob really wanted God to see his giving. Is anyone convinced? Adults you can join in too?

No? Great. Well, what about do we think that Rob really wanted other people to see his giving? Hands up. Yeah, great. We all got it. That is brilliant.

That was fairly obvious. He chose a giant cheque for 30 quid. I've never seen anyone do that. Did he need to give somebody a giant cheque?

[9 : 59] He probably could have just slipped him the cash. He could have bank transferred it and then nobody would have seen. Nobody needs announced with trumpets before they're giving. Nobody needs massive rounds of applause.

He was doing a good thing, wasn't he? But Jesus says that people who do good things like that are hypocrites. It's a big word but it means that they say one thing but they do another.

They act as if they're really generous and selfless. I'm giving my money that I earned with hard working to you. But really it's all about them.

Really that he's giving their money so that other people see and other people like them. They want for other people to be pleased not God. And Jesus says that's their only reward.

That actually they've taken the marshmallow that is right in front of them of other people liking them of other people thinking they're really generous. And so there won't be a further reward when Jesus returns.

[11 : 05] But instead Jesus tells his followers his friends to give to the needy in secret. In verse 3 he says do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

Nobody needs to know or to see when we do give to the needy. We can keep it between God and us. We don't even need to tell our left hand what our right hand is doing.

Sounds impossible but it's that secretive that we can be because no one else needs to know. because God knows. For Jesus says in verse 4 that when we choose to please God and don't show off about all the good things that we do then your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

God sees everything. He sees the bank transfers. He sees everything that you do. and so even when it feels like everything you do goes unnoticed that nobody appreciates you nobody sees all that you do actually God sees and we can keep it between him and us and trust his promises.

Let's see our second example then example number two and it's about when we pray. Praying is something that Jesus calls all of his followers to do and when we pray what we do is we humbly seek God that is that we think little of ourselves and much of God we say to God I need you I need your strength I need your help actually I can't do this on my own so let's see how this person prays and remember our big question for this morning do they want to be seen by God or by people sovereign lord of infinite magnitude originator of all metaphysical realities I your infinitesimal and morally encumbered creature entreat your transcendent benevolence

[13 : 25] I always love tea and coffee time after church it's great catching up and chatting to people don't you think Ennis oh yeah for sure and it's great to see you look there's Rob praying again you know sometimes I wish I prayed as well as he did every time I see him he's praying yeah I know what you mean you know see when he's early for church he doesn't just sit down there and chat with people and wait he's always up there praying I'm not going to lie I don't always understand half the words he says but it looks good he's definitely high up on my top ten list of church members ever it's really inspiring the man just won't stop praying amen oh hi guys wow it's really busy today when I came up here I had no idea how many people were going to show up at 10 30 on a

Sunday morning I hope I wasn't distracting anyone no no no we're in awe of your prayer life you must be a warrior behind closed doors well I kind of do my best prayer here 11am Sunday morning I well what do we think we're asking the same big question let's think did Rob want God or people to see him praying okay let's just shout it out kids what do we think God or people yeah we've got it again that's right he chose to pray in a way that was really obvious he chose to stand in a really obvious place he chose to do a time where people are always going to be at church people were always going to see him up there and again

Jesus calls these people hypocrites they say one thing but they do another remember that we said that prayer is where we humbly seek God where we think little of ourselves and say to God I need you but actually what was going on there while he was pretending to do that he was pretending to need God he was actually pridefully lifting himself up and seeking himself he was going I need a reward out of prayer I need other people to think well of me that's what I need my life would be solved not with God's help but with other people seeing how hard I work maybe then I'll be respected a bit more Jesus says that people who love to pray so that other people see them have already received the reward in full they chose to be rewarded and being well thought of by other people they took that marshmallow that was right in front of them they went

I'll have that I don't need anything more they went for the benefit that was right in front of their eyes they thought I could pray and I could pray so that other people could see me and then they'll like me instead of trusting in God and seeking to please him trusting in a reality that we can't see we can't see God but we can trust that he knows us and he sees!

what we do And so instead in verse 6 Jesus calls his followers that when they pray they should go into their room close the door and pray to the father and then he says this pray to your father who is unseen and then your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you the father always sees us he always hears us when we pray so we don't need to worry!

[17 : 24] think if other people see us or hear us we don't need to worry about using big fancy words that none of us have any clue what they actually mean in contrast to the people who pray for others to see them friends of Jesus know that they can pray to the father by themselves in quiet behind a closed door not needing to be flashing Jesus even goes on to say that the father knows exactly what we need before we even prayed he knows what we need and so that means that we don't have to worry about saying the right thing we don't have to list off a few things in case one of those is possibly what God will answer instead as we have seen in the Lord's prayer we can just ask for our daily bread and God knows exactly what that is and he rewards those who practice their righteousness who do their good deeds not for others to see but for God the father sees everything that is done in private and rewards his people so let's think about our third example!

you're doing well kids stick with it we're about to have the actors back up and the third example he gives is fasting fasting is where we stop eating for a while and what we do is we take our eyes off of worldly concerns and earthly problems and instead go I'm going to focus on God I'm going to seek him more spend more time with him often people do it when they've got really difficult decisions to make or if there's something of a crisis let's watch one more skit and we're asking the same question again you know what it is did they want God or people to see their fasting hey welcome to St Silas it's great to see you take one of these thanks it's great to be here hey welcome to

St Silas it's great to see you take one of these if I have to hey Rob how are you it's great to see you how's life doing I am so miserable I am starving I've been fasting for days it is such a burden but I do it for the Lord so I carry on I think it's great you're doing it and I really admire your faith and appreciate that you're doing it for God even though you really don't want to do it hi I'm Rob I don't know if you've noticed but

I'm fasting well I saw it on your outfit but you were so miserable I didn't think you even wanted me to ask well I did well thank you very much to our actors for today now I think yeah let's give them applause now I think that guy might have been fasting that was the vibe that I got from that wee skit and for the last time then did Rob want God or people to see his fasting people that's right he was pretty intent on making sure that everybody knew about it that nobody could possibly have left church without seeing his ridiculous board that said ask me about my fasting and everybody knew that he wasn't enjoying it he was miserable fasting is not commanded in the

Bible but it is a good thing to do something that Jesus says his followers can do but we should do it for the right reasons and instead clearly Rob was doing it so that other people knew and other people thought well of him perhaps he thought you know what if I'm really going to do this if I'm really going to fast I may as well try and get some reward out of it I may as well try and figure out how other people can know rather than just doing it silently impress some people again Jesus says that's what hypocrites do people who say one thing but do another he was pretending that he was spending more time with God but really we could all see that he was far more focused on other people knowing that he was doing it but Jesus calls his followers that when they fast when we fast we should try not just to seek

[22 : 47] God but to hide it from other people that we are fasting that we shouldn't make it obvious whatsoever that nobody can know and so it's only obvious to our unseen father who sees what we do in secret and with all these things these examples we've looked at Jesus isn't saying that we should never do it with other people that we should never talk about it but he is saying there are ways that you can do it that are wrong there are certainly ways that we can pray and give and fast to encourage one another to talk about it and that's a great thing to do kids do you know how encouraged your parents would be if one morning you went I've been praying for you and you'd been praying for them not because you thought that then they would be impressed with you but because you knew it was a good thing to do and!

to the temptation in life to seize that big marshmallow that's right in front of you and not to wait for his promised reward friends of Jesus do everything for their father in heaven who sees and will reward and we trust that even though we can't see the father that he is good and he keeps his promises and when we have faith in him we seek to please him in all we do we are going to sing an all age song now so as Greg comes up we sing kids if you then go back to your seats I'll come up for five minutes more and we'll think about how this comes home in our lives but let me invite you to stand!

Do you not know Do you not know have you not heard the Lord is the everlasting God Do you not know have you not heard the Lord is the everlasting God the creator of the ends of the earth he will not grow tired or weary his understanding no one can fathom he gives strength to the weary and do you not know have you not heard the Lord is the everlasting God do you not know have you not heard the Lord is the everlasting God even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall but all those who hope in the

Lord will renew their strength they will soar on wings like eagles they will run and not grow weary they will soar on wings like eagles they will run and not be faint Do you not know have you not heard the Lord is the everlasting!

God Do you not know have you not heard the Lord is the everlasting God God the creator of the ends of the earth he will not grow tired or weary his understanding no one can fathom he gives strength to the weary do you not know have you not heard the Lord is the everlasting God do you not know have you not heard the Lord is the everlasting God well do take a seat there everyone now I'm guessing that none of us have ever grabbed a novelty giant check and given it to somebody on the street who needed some money

[27 : 33] I'm guessing that none of us have ever prayed up on the pulpit during tea and coffee time if you have I've certainly never seen you I'm guessing that none of us come into church wearing ridiculous boards asking people to ask us about all the great things that we've done this week for humanity we might not be that brazen but there is a heart attitude that underlies all of it that we can be guilty of too we can share a heart attitude of caring much more about what other people think of us than caring what God thinks than trying to please him when I was around 15 I started going to my church central prayer meeting that met once a month I started going the first time both because we talked about it and it seemed like a good thing to do but actually the main thing that kept me going back for a couple of years was just that people were really nice to me and I knew that go often my heart's motivation was well if

I'm there then people will think highly of me if I'm there people will like me more I'll get the attention of adults rather than just of other youth so for a while that was my main reason for going and the prayer well it was really just a sideshow I wasn't that fussed for it I wonder if you can relate to that it might not be something in church maybe it's at work or at school and you've had an opportunity to help somebody and you knew it was a good thing to do but if you're being honest you only really helped them because your boss or your teacher was watching or because they asked to not because you knew that your father in heaven would approve of it it's a really challenging heart posture to have isn't it to not be motivated by what other people think but just think about what it would be like to be in a church family where we only did good deeds for our father in heaven to see people selflessly secretly loving one another as all serving one another not to gain something here but to please our father in heaven imagine what a witness that would be to the world as they walked in through the church doors and saw people doing that and the way to change our heart motivations the way that we can get better and better at that isn't to keep beating ourselves up saying why are you so selfish why do you keep doing this but it's to get to know our father better

I wonder if you noticed that every time that Jesus tells his followers to be like this instead he tells us that our father who sees what is done in secret will reward you the more we know our heavenly father the more we'll seek his approval over other peoples the more we spend time with him the more that he will be our motivation to do good when we're constantly reminding ourselves that the unseen father sees and rewards the more we'll get it right for him a bigger grasp of who God is a bigger grasp of what God has done a bigger grasp of what he is doing and a bigger grasp of what he will do that will transform our hearts by the work of the spirit to motivate us to practice our righteousness to be seen by him to please him and so when the world tempts us with the biggest fluffiest most attractive marshmallow that you've ever seen in your life and says you can have this right here right now if you'll just tell other people the good that you've done so they'll like you if you just do this thing for yourself do something for yourself we'll be able to say no

I don't need that I know that my father in heaven sees what I do in secret and his reward is so much better I know for certain that Jesus is coming back he has not left me staring at this massive marshmallow forever when faced with such temptations Jesus followers can be careful to reject doing good for people's approval and instead seek to please their heavenly father who sees what is done in secret let's pray together heavenly father we praise you that you always keep your promises that you see everything we do even when it feels like no one sees anything that we do and so we pray you'd help us to do good deeds to please you not for others to be pleased by us and we pray very much that Jesus would return soon and take us to the new creation in his name we pray amen

I'm going to invite Greg back up and we'll stand to sing in response and I'll