

Small Groups @ TBC - Sermon Discussion Notes

Date of Sermon: 17 July 2016

Speaker: Mike Levy

Title: The Sermon on the Mount (12/13) – Kingdom praying and fasting

Read: Matthew 6 verses 5 to 18

Review:

There is a well-known saying “if you’ve got it flaunt it” so our media is plastered with celebrities who do just that. This is also the attitude of the Pharisees when it comes to giving, prayer and fasting.

In each case there is a pattern to what Jesus says:

- He points out their observance
- Says what they should not do
- Identifies their intention
- Points to the reward they were seeking
- Says what they should do
- Says what the true reward should be – the act itself and the effect on drawing close to God

There is also a thread of many strands:

- Righteousness – Jesus compares the true righteousness of Matthew 5 with the righteousness of the Pharisees in Matthew 6
- Attitudes – our attitude should be one of gratitude to God that moves us towards Jesus
- Radical commitment – not to rules but to spiritual disciplines
- Think constantly – of our motives
- Hypocrisy – ouch.....
 - Are we trying to live out the life that Jesus wants us to?
 - Are we being real or pretending like actors on a stage?
 - Are we willing to admit we get it wrong?

Prayer took place every day at 9am, Noon and 3pm. The Pharisees made sure they were in a public place at those times so people could see how well they prayed and that they did observe the times. The 9am and 3pm prayers were associated with temple sacrifices.

Jesus is using hyperbole; he does not mean never pray in public but it is a matter of our heart attitude:

- Do we pray more fervently in public than on our own?
- Am I concerned about what others think of me when I pray in public?
- Is my public praying an overflow from my private praying?
- What do I think of when I pray in public?
- Am I looking for just the right phrase when I pray in public?

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When Jesus talks about the Closed room he is not saying only pray in private in a closed room but it does emphasize the need for our own personal prayer times to build our relationship with God. It is the furthest opposite from what the Pharisees were doing. He took time out along to pray with his Father.

The Lord's prayer was not known as such at the time Jesus was speaking and it is better to think of it as a model prayer. Jesus was not saying pray these exact words every day and only those words and that is your prayer but it is a useful pattern. It gives glory to God and seeks his impact in our lives to be like him. We can use it as a framework for our prayers.

Fasting has its roots in Leviticus 16, when it was once a year in the 7th month linked to the day of atonement. Additional days were added and by the time of Jesus fasting also took place every Monday and Thursday as a reminder of when Moses went up to and came down from Mount Sinai. So it became a chance for Pharisees to outdo each other in looking miserable. Fasting is not commanded by Jesus but it is one way of drawing closer to God, Jesus fasted before his ministry. It is a way of clearing the decks to seek God and remove distractions from life while we do so. It is not a time to be miserable but it is a time to be disciplined.

Reflect and Respond:

1. Why did Jesus choose the abuse of almsgiving, prayer and fasting to condemn?
2. What areas do we use today in the same way?
3. Where is our 'closed room' for prayer?
4. Share your experiences of fasting.
5. Why is attitude more important than actions?
6. How do you stay authentic?
7. What experiences have you had of people watching to see if you are authentic?
8. Is anything holding you back from praying in public and how might you overcome it?