

An Audience of One

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 April 2014

Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Thanks be to God. Seek to live out your word for the glory of your name.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen. Well last Friday was our daughter's sixth birthday as well as Anzac Day. I think we've got a slide of her.

Thanks young. Here she is very happy and with the butterfly cake and lollies on it that my wife made. Now when this cake was cut, Megan our daughter was offered the first piece because she was the birthday girl.

But then she said, no that's okay, Tim can have that piece. And we thought, oh isn't that lovely? To which Megan replied, well that piece doesn't have many lollies on it.

I want that one. At least she's honest. But you see we can do something right like letting someone else go first but have wrong motives.

[1 : 23] We can do right things for wrong reasons, can't we? And today Jesus warns us about doing that. About doing right things for wrong reasons.

In fact for Jesus that's what he calls a hypocrite. Now when we think of the word hypocrite we usually think of someone who says one thing but then does another. So for example a person who might say, oh we should go to church but then they never go to church themselves.

That's normally how we think of the word hypocrite. But there's also a type of hypocrite where you act like you're pleasing God to receive his praise when really you're just trying to impress people to receive their applause.

In fact the word hypocrite originally meant an actor. And so as we return to Jesus' sermon on the mount this morning, he warns his followers not to be like this hypocrite.

Who acts as though they're doing things to please God for his praise when really they're doing things to impress people to receive their applause.

[2 : 27] You see Jesus is again concerned about our hearts and the motives of our hearts. It's what we saw from our first reading from Isaiah.

God is concerned not with those who go through the motions and do their sacrifices when they also go and hurt their neighbor. No, no, he loves the one who is humble and contrite, who trembles at his word.

And Jesus is on about the same thing this morning. So let's have a look at the principle which is point one, verse one. So in your Bibles, Jesus says, 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. Now for those of us who remember what Jesus said back in chapter five, this might seem odd.

You see, Jesus says here in chapter six that we are not to practice our deeds to be seen by others. But in chapter five, he said we are to practice our deeds to be seen by others.

[3 : 33] So what's going on? In fact, let me show you. So turn back just one page in your Bibles at chapter five, verse 13. So chapter five, verse 13. And let me show you from there.

So do you remember what Jesus is saying? He says to his disciples, you are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

And he says, you are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. No, instead they put it on its stand. It stands out and it gives a light to everyone in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. You see what Jesus is saying here?

We are to live such good lives that will stand out as different, like salt stands out in terms of flavor, like light stands out, like a city on a hill stands out.

[4 : 37] Now, let me remind us at this point that Jesus is speaking to his disciples. He's not saying we live such good lives so that we can earn our way into God's kingdom.

No, no. It's only by believing in Jesus that we are forgiven. It's only by believing in Jesus that we are given a place in God's kingdom. It's only by believing in Jesus that we are given life eternal.

But once we are given those things, once we are his followers, then Jesus is saying, now live good lives, such good lives that you stand out.

In fact, if we don't stand out, if we are no different, if we lose our saltiness, then we won't be effective disciples for Jesus. No, Jesus says we must stand out by living such good lives, even better than the other good people in the world, so that people will see our good deeds.

And in the rest of chapter 5, Jesus goes on to give us some examples of what that looks like. But then how does that fit with chapter 6, verse 1, where Jesus says, do not let your good deeds be seen before others.

[5 : 48] What's going on here? Well, they actually do fit together because both chapters 5 and 6 are all about doing things for God.

In fact, they are two sides of the same coin, actually. And we are to do good deeds so that people might glorify God, chapter 5, verse 16, and not so that they will glorify us, chapter 6, verse 1.

You see, they are two sides of the same coin, which are about pleasing God for his glory and not for our own. And so when Jesus says in verse 1, be careful not to practice your righteous acts in front of others to be seen by them.

He is saying, don't seek to do things for people's applause, but rather do it for God's praise. In other words, when we do our righteous deeds on the stage of life, it's as though there is just one person in our audience that we are to please and receive praise from.

And that one person is, of course, God. We have an audience of one. Now, how do I know that this is what Jesus means in chapter 6, verse 1? Well, because Jesus, again, gives us some examples to show us.

[7 : 00] This time there are three examples, and each of them follows the same pattern, which is on the next slide. And so each example, we have three parts. The first, Jesus says, do not be like the hypocrite with dot, dot, dot.

And the next part of the pattern is, instead, do it secretly so only God sees. And then each of the three examples ends with that line, and your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

But you'll notice, by the way, that verses 7 to 15 don't fit that pattern. So in verse 6, when Jesus is talking about prayer, he's saying, he ends that example with, and your father in heaven who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

He ends that example with the same line. But then in verse 7, he takes a digression. So 7 to 15 are actually a digression, an opportunity for Jesus to talk about prayer.

Now, I really don't like skipping over bits of passage. But because this is a digression from the main point, and I really need a whole sermon, at least, to talk about the Lord's Prayer. There's so much in there to do it justice.

[8 : 07] We'll pass over verses 7 to 15 for today. But if you'd like to hear a bit more about the Lord's Prayer, then I encourage you to check out our new website and have a look on there and listen to Andrew's sermon, which he preached just last year, July, on these very verses about the Lord's Prayer.

Anyway, with that background in mind, let's have a look at the first example that Jesus gives. About doing things to please God rather than impress people. So we're at point 2, verse 2. He says, 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 their reward in full. The first example here is about giving money to the needy. Now, this is a good thing to do.

We are to give to the needy. Whenever we are able to do so. We are to care for those who are less fortunate than ourselves, as we have means, as we are able to do.

Why? Well, because it's a loving thing to do, isn't it? And because God wants us to do it. He tells us that in places like James chapter 1. But how we give also matters because it shows our motive.

[9 : 23] You see, the hypocrite acts as though he's giving to God or for God. But when he does it, he kind of blows his own trumpet, verse 2, which is perhaps where that saying came from. Now, I doubt these hypocrites literally blew their own trumpets.

I mean, it's hard to imagine them having a trumpet and putting the money in. Jesus is kind of using exaggerated language here. He's saying that by the way they give, they're drawing attention to themselves.

So much so that they may well as have blown a trumpet. But why do they draw attention to themselves? Well, verse 2 again, it says, so they are honored by others.

That's their motive. In fact, in the original language, the New Testament was written in. The word for honored there in verse 2 is the same word for glorified in chapter 5, verse 16.

In other words, instead of doing things for God's glory, chapter 5, verse 16, they are now doing it for their own glory. Their own honor.

[10 : 27] Instead of seeking God's praise, they are seeking people's applause. Some years ago, I was at another church and I was invited over for a cup of coffee with a church member.

And so we went into the kitchen to get the coffee sorted. And I noticed on his fridge, he had three pictures of some sponsor children. And he put them up there to remind his family to pray for them and the kids to do the same, which is a great thing to do.

And I made a comment about it. But then he said, oh yeah, we actually sponsor a lot more than that. We actually sponsor eight kids. And we're actually going to go over to Ethiopia at the end of the year and see them.

Because we want to show them that we love them and not like other people who sponsor children and never do anything. Now this guy was doing a great thing. He was sponsoring eight children in need.

A brilliant thing to do. Writing letters to them, planning a trip, which he did take. Terrific things. You know, it put me and my wife without one sponsor child to shame.

[11 : 28] But at that moment, he was blowing his own trumpet so that I might be impressed and applaud him, which I was. And I did. I said, wow, that's great.

But Jesus says he just got his reward in full. All that work he did and all he got was a wow, that's great for me when he could have got well done, good and faithful servant from God.

And so says Jesus, give in secret so only God knows. See verse three. 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. Now, again, Jesus is using exaggerated language here to make a point. I mean, it's very hard to give with your right hand without your left hand knowing.

I've tried it once. I was at a Christian convention and then they were passing a bucket around for a good cause. So good, I can't remember. But anyway, I tried it.

[12 : 28] You know, I put money with my right hand and I looked away and used my left hand. I just got to scratch my face to try and, you know, do something else. I mean, it's ridiculous, isn't it? Of course you know what your right hand and left hand is doing. But the point is we're to be so secret about it that not even our own body knows what's going on.

That's Jesus's point. In other words, it's meant to be just between God and us. We are before an audience of one person, God.

And giving in secret ensures that our motives are right because no one else is there to see. No one else is there to praise us. Only God. Someone put it like this on the next slide.

This fancy saying. It says, secrecy safeguards our sincerity. You know, doing things in secret safeguards.

It ensures that we have sincere motives. Secrets are not always a good thing. But when it comes to doing good deeds, secrets are a great thing because it helps make sure that we're doing it for the right motive.

[13 : 33] It safeguards our sincerity. It's why churches often use those envelopes. So our giving is in secret. Of course, you can even misuse those, can't you?

You know, you can give just a little bit and no one will know either. But can I say that I've been encouraged by people here at our church? I know several who have given a significant amount of money, as in thousands upon thousands, but have asked that it be kept quiet.

Why? Because it was between them and God. They did it for God in his glory and not their own. And so no one else need know about it. You see, here are people who have genuinely godly motives.

And I'll tell you what, they will be rewarded by their father in heaven. Well, Jesus continues with the next example, that of prayer in verse five. Verse five, he says, 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.

Truly, I tell you, they have received their reward in full. I like giving the hypocrites pray in a way that draws attention to themselves so that people might sing. You go, oh, my goodness, that is such a godly person.

[14 : 45] Look at him praying. And they might be applauded by people. And Jesus says that praise from people. Well, that's their reward. Done in full. I remember when I was at university, I went to the minister's house for Bible study.

And when it came to prayer time, people took turns to pray. And when it came to my turn, I made sure I prayed all the right things. And as I was praying, I heard some important people in the room, some leaders kind of, you know, doing, you know how some people go to the mm, do the mm things.

And they would do it mm to a lot of the things that I was praying. And I thought, oh, gee, my prayer must be pretty good. And so that spurred me on. I thought I'd better include some of the biggest words I know.

And so I said, oh, majestic Father, thank you for the peritiation of our sins and not that you just expiated our sins. I can't remember what big words I used. But I tried to put all these big words in.

And at the end of the prayer, everyone said a hearty amen. And I felt like I could have rivaled the Apostle Paul for prayer. And then a sudden realization came over me.

[15 : 50] I just prayed to impress people, not please God. I went home shortly after that, ashamed. And Jesus said I'd received my reward in full.

You see, when we pray, what matters most are our motives, not our words. We're not to try and impress others with eloquent language or flowery speech.

We are to pray sincerely to God. And if we're praying in public, then we're to do it simply so others can follow and say amen. In fact, you don't even have to know much theology to pray in a way that pleases God.

It's all about the attitude of our hearts, our motives. But to help us have the right motive, Jesus says then in verse number 6, He says, But when you do 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. Again, it's the idea that secrecy safeguards our sincerity. Because when we pray in secret, then people don't see.

[16 : 58] And so there's no temptation to try and impress people. But it's more than that. Jesus is emphasizing that it's meant to be between just us and God. And when it's in secret, it's only God who sees.

You see, we have an audience of one person we are trying to please. But this naturally begs the question, does this mean then we should not pray in public at all? That, you know, prayer time at church, we should, you know, scrap that.

Well, we'll come back to that in a moment. For now, let's look at the third example in verse 16. Fasting. Jesus says, Now, in the New Testament, there's no command to Christians that we should or must fast.

But Jesus speaks here as though we might fast from time to time. He says, when you fast, not if you fast. And certainly we see the first Christians fasting before significant decisions in the book of Acts, for example.

And so it seems like it might be a helpful thing to do from time to time. To try to get rid of all distractions, including food, and focus on praying and reflecting on God's word.

[18 : 15] Though I realize it's not possible for everyone. If I go too long without food, I get grumpy. Maybe that's more of my problem. But the point is the same here in this example, isn't it?

Whatever it is we do, whether it's giving, praying, or fasting, we are not to draw attention to ourselves to show everyone at church how super spiritual we are. Like the hypocrites did.

They walked around with somber faces and it seems as though they kind of put white ash on their face to make their face more pale so that people would see and notice. Oh, you're doing it tough, aren't you?

Doing it tough for the Lord. That's what they used to do. But again, Jesus says it's meant to be between just you and God. You have an audience of one whom you are seeking to please.

So verse 17, 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.

[19 : 13] And your Father who sees what he's done in secret will reward you, he says. Again, it's that idea of doing things in secret. So we won't be tempted to seek people's applause.

But does this mean then we can only do our righteous deeds in secret? As I said before, does this mean we should get rid of all public prayer, including in the church service?

And the answer is, of course not. I mean, for some things, you just cannot do them secretly, can you? Take washing up after morning tea, for example. It's not as though Jesus expects you to hide in the cupboard under the kitchen sink and wash up in there.

It's ridiculous, isn't it? Jesus' point about secrecy has been so that only God sees. In other words, it's about doing things in front of one person.

It's about seeking to please one person. It's about receiving praise from one person, God. That's why I've called the sermon an audience of one. Because it's all about seeking to please God, the one and only, and receive praise from him alone.

[20 : 18] And this principle of an audience of one can be applied to things done in secret, all things done in public. And so when we do the washing up, we're to remember that we're doing it for God alone, to please him alone.

And so we won't draw any excess attention to ourselves. We won't say, stop everyone, I'm now about to wash a plate, or something ridiculous like that.

Of course, no one would ever do that. Though, at other churches, I've heard people come out after washing up and say, I'm sorry I couldn't chat to you, I was just doing the dishes, I thought someone should do it.

But, yeah, right. The other thing we're to remember, though, is that when God sees, it ought to be freeing.

You see, when you read verse 18, and although we cannot see God, he sees us in everything we do, does that fill you with guilt or freedom? When I first read this and thought about it, I felt guilty because it meant God could see all the bad things I've done.

[21 : 22] But in this passage, it's meant to be freeing. It means that we can do things even if people don't see us, even if they don't thank us, because God does see, and God will reward.

It's meant to encourage us to be content, even if no one appreciates what we do, because God appreciates, God sees, God will reward.

That's meant to be incredibly freeing and encouraging. A couple of years ago, I started taking the church bins out on a Sunday night, and after doing it for a while, I found myself one Sunday night, almost waiting until people from six o'clock came out, so they could, you know, see what a good pastor, humble servant I was.

And then I realised and remembered this passage. The only person that matters does see. God. And the reward he will give me will be better than any praise that people might give.

And so it encouraged me to keep serving. Now, I was reluctant to tell you that illustration, because I've just shot myself in the foot, I've just announced to you all that I take the bins out. But don't praise me, I want God's praise.

[22 : 31] And we should still encourage each other, we should still thank each other, but we shouldn't rely on that encouragement, we shouldn't rely on that thanks. We have to rely on God, who sees and will reward.

So what would a person who took this teaching seriously look like? What would we see in a person who took this teaching seriously? Well, we wouldn't see much.

We just noticed that things were being done. In fact, even things that weren't even covered by a roster would be done. We wouldn't really know who was doing these things, we just noticed that they were being done.

Because a person isn't creating a fuss, isn't drawing attention to themselves. We have lots of people like this in our church, and I'm incredibly encouraged, by the way, so many people just get on with the task and do it, without creating a fuss, without drawing attention to themselves.

In fact, we're celebrating the anniversary of a couple who are like that today, Bill and Mary. They get on and do things, without the fuss, without drawing attention to themselves.

[23 : 38] And so it's a privilege serving with people like them and you all at Holy Trinity. May we continue to do good, not to impress people, to be applauded by them, but to please God and receive his reward of well done, good and faithful servant.

You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness. Now, won't that be a great reward?

Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this reminder from your son this morning that we are to do things and live good lives, but we are to do them with the right motive, the motive of seeking to please you and receive praise from you alone.

Father, we pray that you might help us in this, in Jesus' name. Amen.