

# Doing the Right Things for the Right Reasons?

*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: 25 August 2019

Preacher: Alistair Chalmers

[ 0 : 00 ] Now, Sabina, just before you sit down, I have one question for you. How can we best be praying for you this week? Well, I have a bit of a problem in that I really feel like I should donate to charity.

And it's either £2,000 or £3,000. And I'm not quite sure. We're saving for a house, so I'm tending more towards the £2,000. But the charity does give you a lovely little emblem on their wall if you donate £3,000 or plus, which also sounds quite attractive.

And also, I mean, maybe you can join me just fasting about this topic. It's weighing heavy on my heart. And I know that fasting is really difficult.

And I'm not sure I'm even going to make it past the first day because it's just so exhausting with work and everything else that goes on. And, you know, we need the energy and the food. But maybe you'd like to join me in fasting too.

So I'd really appreciate that. Now, I wonder if you were having that conversation with Sabina and she gave you that response. What would you think her motives are?

[ 1 : 14 ] So she's talking about doing good and doing right things, but for the wrong reasons. And that's what we see this evening in our passage in Matthew chapter 6.

People are doing the right things, but for the wrong reasons. So in chapter 5, Jesus was teaching the people about the law of God and correcting their misunderstandings and misapplications of the law.

And that part of the Sermon of the Mount ended with the command in chapter 5, verse 48. You can look at there where it says, Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

In the verses that we're looking at this evening, I hope that we will both be comforted and challenged. Because Matthew 6 acts like a mirror for our motives.

We stand before it with all our religious and devotional practices. And we see that we're either doing things to serve the Lord, or we're doing them to be seen by others.

[ 2 : 28 ] What will we find this evening? Will we find a heart that desires to serve the Lord and therefore does the right things for the right reasons?

Or will we find a heart that is stained by sin and that does the practices of giving, praying, and fasting, not for the glory and honor of God, but instead to receive honor and glory from mankind. So Jesus focuses on giving, praying, and fasting. And he is teaching that as Christians, as people who want to live lives that glorify him in every way, we need to do these things for the right reasons. But why does Jesus pick these things in particular? Why doesn't he focus on something else? I think Jesus picked these three topics because they were the religious practices of the day that were being abused.

But these truths are timeless. These practices can be misused just as much today as they were back then. We can do and we should do the right things like giving, praying, and fasting, but we need to be doing them for the right reasons.

[ 3 : 53 ] And that is what Jesus is asking us this evening. Are you doing the right things for the right reasons? And look with me at verse 1. Jesus starts with an introductory comment that summarizes pretty much everything we're going to be speaking about this evening.

In verse 1 he says, Now this is a sober warning for every Christian.

The practices of righteousness that Jesus is speaking about are the religious act of devotion to God. These practices should not be done so that other people can see us and give us praise, but they are to be done for our Father in heaven.

Now this doesn't mean that people won't see us doing these things. I hope that everyone on this earth sees or hears a Christian live out their faith during their everyday life.

Jesus isn't telling us to go run to the hills and hide in caves away from everyone else, but he's shining light on our motives. These practices of righteousness are the good and right things that Christians should be doing, but we need to do them for the glory of our Heavenly Father.

[ 5 : 19 ] And so in verse 2, and in verses 2 to 4, Jesus speaks about giving. And he hones in on this topic, but do you notice he doesn't wade in gently.

There is no sugarcoating on this teaching. It flies right in the face of the wrong motives and practices that were at play in his day and that are at play today.

This week I had a quick search on the internet and discovered that the two topics that make most British people feel uncomfortable, the two topics that people try to avoid are religion and money. We spend so much of our lives working, saving, budgeting, worrying about how much money we need to save for that house, for that car, for that holiday.

And those are all good things. But how often do we take time to think about giving? Now this isn't talking about just giving a few pounds to a homeless person as you walk to work.

[ 6 : 28 ] But this is calculated giving. You've sat down and you've thought about it properly. And notice how Jesus starts in verse 2. When you give.

So Jesus expects people to give of their finances as a sign of their devotion to and love for the Lord. He could have started with if you give.

But he started with when you give. And two kinds of giving are mentioned here. Religious giving in verse 2 and giving to the needy in verse 3.

So for us you have giving to the church and giving to those in need. In verse 2, read along with me. He says, When you give, do not announce it with trumpets as the hypocrites do.

Now why do they announce it with trumpets? To be honoured by others. We've all seen this, haven't we? Companies that have billions of billions of pounds in revenue hold a press conference to hand over a check to a charity.

[ 7 : 37 ] Celebrities take selfies in soup kitchens on Christmas day. Or more everyday examples. People bragging about how much they donate to charities or casually dropping it in a conversation here and there.

Or people going forward during collection in a church, not once, not twice, but three times, making sure that people see them. Now these are all good things that we should be doing, but are they being done for the right reason?

Jesus says that people do this to be honoured by others. And the original word there that the NIV translates as honoured is better translated as praise or worship.

So these hypocrites want to be worshipped for their giving. They're seeking the attention and glory instead of giving it to God.

But I think if we're all honest, we struggle with this one. Our sinful hearts want to receive all the praise from those around us. We don't want to naturally give it to God.

[ 8 : 49 ] In verses 3, Jesus says, When you give, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Now people have used this verse to argue for absolute secrecy.

But if you look at it in its context of the whole chapter, you see Jesus warning people not to glorify or draw attention to their giving. So it's not that we need to hide our giving and almost be ashamed of it, but we aren't to draw attention to it.

Jesus is saying, forget about yourself when you give. Instead, give to and give for God. Do not glorify your service to God, but glorify God as you serve him.

Now we can look at this passage and we can think, well, I never do any of those things. But how often do we walk past a homeless person or a person in need on the street without thinking?

How often do we think more about our savings than we do our spendings for the kingdom of God? Or flip that on its head. Have you ever given thanks publicly for how God has been blessing you, maybe financially or spiritually, since you started giving more to the church?

[ 10 : 18 ] What are the real motives in our hearts at those times? Are we really doing the right things for the right reasons? All of our money comes from God.

It is not our own. And so our attitude should be that of sacrificial giving for the good of the kingdom, for the good of people, and to glorify God in every single way.

That's what giving for the right reason looks like. And then in verses five to eight, Jesus speaks about praying. Now notice again the same expectation that Jesus has of his followers in verse five.

When you pray, do not. So Jesus is warning his listeners and us today of the dangers of doing the right things for the wrong reasons.

There are some, like Jesus says in all three of these sections, who are hypocrites. They love to stand in the public eye and pray for all to see and hear.

[11:26] This doesn't mean that it's wrong to pray standing up or to pray in public. That was common practice among Jews in Jesus' time. A devout Jew would have prayed during three set times a day.

And that would mean that you probably would see at some point people praying in the street. That isn't the problem. Jesus isn't condemning public prayer. But notice that four letter word in verse five, love.

These hypocrites love to be seen praying publicly. They stand up and make themselves stand out to be praised by others.

So the problem isn't public prayer, but it's the reason behind it. And the challenge for us is to reflect on our own prayer lives.

Do you pray out loud in a church meeting so that you can use that new theological word that you've been sitting on for two weeks? Or to use that passage that you've just spent a month memorizing from scripture?

[12:36] Now, all of these are good things that we should be doing. But our motivation, if our motivation is to be praised by others, then we're doing the right thing for the wrong reason.

One element of a healthy prayer life is submission to God and recognition that we can do nothing outside of him. And these hypocrites were doing the exact opposite.

Their prayers didn't humble them, but they puffed them up. So we need to watch our motives because this is a very, very easy trap for us to fall into.

We start to think how others are hearing our prayers rather than how our Heavenly Father is hearing our prayer. And in verse seven, look with me, you get another when you do not.

Now this verse suggests that the hypocrites filled their prayers with worthless words. Jesus uses the illustration of pagans because when they prayed, they would have repeated the names of their gods and other words over and over and over again.

[13:49] We'd probably call it chanting today rather than praying. If you want an example of this, go home and read 1 Kings chapter 18, where the prophets of Baal and Elijah are on top of a mountain and they're testing who has more power, the God of Israel or the false god Baal.

And so they kill a bull and they put it on top of some wood and the prophets of Baal go in circles, chanting, beating themselves, calling and begging for their false gods to answer them for hours on end.

But nothing happens. And Elijah throws water on the wood and prays and in seconds, God answers. There are religions today where people pray and repeat certain phrases or have certain stances when they pray.

They raise their voice, they cut themselves, they make parades and hold huge feasts for false gods who have no ears to hear, who have no eyes to see what their people are doing and who have no mouths to eat or to speak to them.

So the hypocrites of Jesus' day were piling tons of eloquent phrases into their prayer, almost mindlessly repeating things in order to be seen by others.

[15:18] But do you see how in this whole bit there is no mention of their private prayer life? They seem to only reserve their prayers for when they're in public, for when people are around and people can hear them.

They're praying to people, they're not praying to God. And I don't think we can sit back and think that this is irrelevant for us. This should challenge the way we view and practice prayer.

Prayer is the way we communicate with our Heavenly Father. And so our attitude to and our prayer lives should be one of devotion to God and a desire to glorify Him in every way.

So how is your prayer life? It's easy, isn't it, to convince people around us that we're doing well and that we pray regularly. We tell people that we'll pray for them as we leave the Sunday services.

But do we actually do it? Now maybe we don't fill our prayers with meaningless repetition, but how often do we use beautiful language that we know people want to hear?

[16:36] Instead of thinking how others see our prayer life, we should focus on how God sees our prayer life. That means that we shouldn't shy away from praying publicly because we maybe feel

inadequate or we feel that we don't pray beautifully enough.

Instead, we should focus on God and praying to Him like we would if we were sitting at our kitchen table at home reading our Bibles in the morning. We should be doing the right things for the right reasons.

We should be praying to God because we are told to in His Word and we should be doing it both publicly and privately. And the two should be the same.

We should not, we should be coming before the Lord, laying ourselves bare before Him, confessing our sins, praising Him for His goodness, bringing our daily needs before Him and in assurance, knowing that He is a Father who loves, who cares, and who listens to us.

in the case of public prayer, we need to forget ourselves and focus on glorifying God. That is what it means to do the right thing for the right reason.

[ 17 : 56 ] And then in verses 16 to 18, Jesus speaks about fasting. Now fasting is a topic that seems to be sidelined in many churches today.

And I wonder if the majority of Christians around the world live as if these verses don't exist. But fasting is a religious and devotional practice that we see in the Bible.

We cannot ignore it. We see it in the Old Testament law. Israel were to fast for certain days a year. In Isaiah chapter 58, God corrects Israel for how they had twisted fasting and used it to lord themselves over others.

The Pharisees fasted twice a week. John the Baptist's followers fasted often. Jesus himself fasted for 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness.

He teaches on fasting in these verses and in Matthew 9, verses 14 to 17. In Acts and in the New Testament letters, we see examples of the apostles' fasting.

[ 19 : 06 ] So we cannot ignore this topic. And again, Jesus starts in verse 16 with the same expectation. When you fast, do not.

And it's very basic definition. Fasting is the abstinence from food. The Bible uses different ideas of why we should fast and its purpose.

So we fast in eager anticipation of Jesus' return. We fast as an example of our self-discipline and self-denial. We fast as a way of humbling ourselves which leads us to rely and depend more on God.

And we fast so that we can spend more time in God's word and praying to him. But the hypocrites that Jesus is speaking to had distorted fasting for their own glorification.

read with me verse 16. When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting.

[ 20 : 16 ] The word used in the NIV for somber could be translated as gloomy. So the hypocrites were doing a religious act of devotion but you can imagine them walking down the street one day clutching their stomachs moaning every second until someone finally asked the question they've been waiting for.

What's wrong with you today? And then they kick in. Oh, I'm just fasting. Don't you worry about me. I'm just giving up food as a sign of how holy I am and to prove to God that I can do it.

And then come the comments. Oh, good for you. You're such a good Christian. I wish I could do that. I can't even go one hour without food. Never mind one day. But they took it even further.

It appears from verse 17 that they purposefully did not wash their face or make themselves presentable because they wanted people to ask them what was wrong.

They wanted an excuse to toot their own horn about how holy they are. So instead of what we would normally do before we leave the house checking in the mirror making sure we're okay and we look presentable, they checked the mirror before they left to make sure they were scruffy enough.

[ 21 : 41 ] Much like the children's story of Snow White and the queen who had a mirror and that she looked in every day and asked mirror, mirror on the wall who is the fairest of them all.

All is well as long as the mirror replies you are. But when the mirror responds one day with Snow White is, the truth comes out and reveals the wickedness and jealousy of the queen.

The mirror revealed inner ugliness. And these hypocrites did the opposite. They looked in the mirror to make sure they did not look nice.

To make sure that people could tell they were fasting. Their mirror would display outward signs of ugliness. But it revealed the same thing. They had ugliness of the heart.

Their hearts were in the wrong and they focused on themselves not on God. Jesus says let your fasting go unseen by others because the only one who matters is God and he sees everything. [ 22 : 52 ] Jesus says forget about yourself and fast for God and his glory. So the challenge here is do you fast?

Jesus expects his followers to. Now he doesn't give us a timetable or a set period that we need to fast for but the truth is that he expects us to and that means we cannot ignore these verses. I'd encourage you to go home and think about this. Read Isaiah 58. Read Jesus' words in Matthew 9 and with wisdom put into practice what Jesus is teaching us here.

Now these are three big and practical topics that Jesus expects us to do as his followers. Giving praying and fasting are the right things for us to do as Christians but are we doing them for the right reasons?

We should forget about ourselves and focus on God. Doing these things for the right reasons mean that we do them for God and not for the praise of others.

[ 24 : 06 ] But this also means that it is not our place to question other people's motives. Jesus is challenging every individual to look in themselves.

It is not our place to stand in judgment of someone else's motives. The question that we need to walk away from this evening from Matthew chapter 6 is are we doing the right things for the right reasons?

Let's pray together. Father, we come before you the God who sees, who knows all things. You know our thoughts, you know our actions and you know our motives. and we ask you for forgiveness for the times that we have done good things, right things for the wrong reasons. We pray that you would help us leave this building this evening encouraged by our discussions, uplifted by our prayer time, and with a new desire to do right things for the right reasons.

[ 25 : 15 ] that everything we do would be done for your glory, for the upbuilding of your kingdom, and for the praise of your holy and precious name.

Amen. We're going to have a few minutes break now where you can grab a tea or coffee and then we're going to come back and have a discussion.

So I've got two questions for us to think about when we come back and they are, why can these three topics be difficult to live out and which is most difficult for you and why?

So I kind of cheated there's three questions in that one but we'll pass it off as one question. And then the second one, what are other righteous acts that we can do today for the wrong reasons?

So just take a few minutes, go grab tea, coffee and I think there's still some nibbles back there and then I'll call us all back for discussion around our tables.