

Giving in Secret

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Date: 02 August 2026

Preacher: Craig Campbell

[0:00] Well, a very good morning. Let me add my welcome to Derek's. My name is Craig and I'm a pastor! and I'm a pastor in training here at Brunsfield and it's a great joy to be speaking this morning.

I was just reflecting, it's been a few months, so it's always good to, if you're in the habit of speaking or teaching, to get back into it. So do forgive me if I'm stumbling over my words this morning or, as Derek was saying, if there's anything that I say this morning that you have any more questions about or do come up and ask afterwards. It's really good to just be growing together in our understanding of the word. A big part of that is kind of discussing it together. So yeah, we are back in the Gospel of Matthew this morning and yeah, we've had a bit of a break over the summer. We have been looking at Psalm 119 and it's just good to be back in this series and we are going through Matthew's Gospel systematically. So we're going through it chapter by chapter, verse by verse from start to finish and the purpose of studying God's Word in this way, systematically, is that we believe that God's Word has, God has revealed himself through his Word comprehensively in the 66 books of the Bible. So each book of the Bible has a different message for us with a different angle on who God is. So by studying whole books of the Bible from start to finish, we study the Bible the way that God has given it to us and we believe that by doing so, God will reveal who he is and who his Son is even more fully and wonderfully than before. So this means that we don't shy away from tricky passages when they come up and we don't avoid studying challenging Bible books, but we believe that the whole counsel of God has been given to us to learn from even the tough bits. So that's basically what I mean when I say that we're studying Matthew systematically. We're going through it verse by verse, but just a bit more on the message of Matthew. So the message of Matthew is that the promised king of Israel has arrived. He has arrived in the scene. Jesus was born as a baby in Israel. We read that in Matthew's gospel at the beginning. And he grew up and he began his ministry in the region of Galilee. And at that time, Jesus and John the Baptist, they were preaching the same message to the people. They said, repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. So what they were both saying was that God's kingdom has been inaugurated. It has been set into motion and people could now enter into it by repenting of their sins and turning to the king, this man, Jesus Christ, and committing their lives fully to him. So in this message, I'm going to refer to Christians as kingdom people. That's people who have given their lives to the king and become citizens of his kingdom. That's a kingdom that's all around us and is as real as the wooden pews that you're sitting on, but we can't see it in all its fullness just yet. But if you're a Christian here, you are a kingdom person. You are a citizen of his kingdom. Now we're also returning to a part of Matthew known as the Sermon on the Mount.

And this is where Jesus speaks without interruption for three chapters, from chapters five to seven. Now the Sermon on the Mount is the Bible's most famous sermon, which was spoken by the word himself.

Now many people had gathered to hear this sermon on the Mount. You can maybe imagine some of the people that are there. So Jesus's disciples are there. The religious leaders are there. And there are many other people who haven't quite made up their minds about who this Jesus is yet. But in this sermon, Jesus is returning to the Old Testament law and he's teaching his disciples, his kingdom people, how they ought to live in the kingdom now that the king has arrived.

[4:28] So in this part of the Sermon on the Mount that we've reached this morning in chapter six, we reach a trio of messages where Jesus is addressing three very visible styles of worship. So over the next three weeks, we're going to look at giving, praying and fasting. And there's a common problem which affects all three that Jesus wants to address. And that problem is, is that in all these three styles of worship, there are people who wish to make a big show of their worship to God.

Now, I hope you've still got your Bibles open in chapter six. But in verse one, verse one acts as a bit of an introduction to this trio of messages. I've got it on the screen as well. Six verse one, it 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. Jesus is warning his followers not to practice their righteousness in front of others.

Now, what this means is that as Jesus's followers worship God outwardly in their giving or their praying or their fasting, they mustn't seek to wow other people. Their worship must remain fixed on God and not on themselves.

Now, in teaching them these things, Jesus is doing two things. He's teaching his disciples what it means to be kingdom people. We've established that already. But he's also calling out the sham worship that he sees all around him, particularly that of the religious leaders who are following him around, who are taking notes, who are seeking to trap Jesus in his words. By calling out the showy self-worship that he sees all around them, he is warning his disciples not to be impressed by the flashy acts of worship.

Worship in God's kingdom looks much different. So in our four verses, the problem is showy giving. Showy giving. The hypocrites love to make a show of their giving, but subjects of God's kingdom must give in secret. Kingdom people must not seek the honour that comes from man. Rather, they should seek a greater future reward, which is hidden with our father in heaven. So we're going to look at these four verses in two parts. So kingdom people give to the needy and kingdom people give for a greater reward. Let's look at the first of those now. Kingdom people give to the needy. Now, the first thing that we should notice in these verses is that Jesus takes it for granted that his followers will give to the needy. We see that in verse two. So when you give to the needy, and again in verse four, but when you give to the needy, he's taking it for granted that his followers and the people around him will give to the needy. Now, the Jews had been commanded by God and the law to give freely to those who are in need. And if you're taking notes, you can look up the passage later. It's in Deuteronomy chapter 15. It's really interesting to see the specific command by God that Jesus is referring to. Deuteronomy 15 verse 7 to 11. But giving to the needy in Jesus' day was supposed to be much more than just an act of obedience. It was much more than just obeying this law.

It was supposed to be an act of worship to God who had freely given them his grace and blessings. Jesus also takes it for granted that his followers should give to the needy because giving should be as natural as breathing for citizens of the kingdom. So too, for us, we are taught throughout the New Testament that giving what belongs to us back to God as an act of worship should be as normal as breathing for us. But who are the needy in view here? Who are these needy folks? Well, I'm convinced that it's both the physically needy and the spiritually needy. God's followers should give for the good of needy bodies and souls. God cares about both. To share the gospel with the needy, with the spiritually hungry, but to leave them malnourished and not give them something to eat would be a gross sin. But also the

[9:37] Christian focusing entirely on feeding the needy and meeting his material needs but neglecting to share the hope of the gospel with them and leaving them spiritually malnourished is also not right in God's eyes. In Jesus' day, there would very likely have been an organized welfare system in place at the local synagogue, which people would have donated to, would have given to. Maybe you've got an older Bible translation with you this morning and older Bible translations use the word almsgiving in this passage instead of giving. And the giving of alms is maybe a more helpful way of understanding what this giving is. So it might include sharing material gifts with the needy. It might have included sharing food or money or whatever else the needy person required. Now, in a similar way today, our nation has a welfare system which is operated not by the church but by the government and citizens of this country pay taxes which fund the benefits which are then handed out to the needy. So there is a welfare system in our country today which helps the physically needy. But Jesus is not speaking to us about paying our taxes this morning. We have already established that he is speaking about worship filled giving. Yes, God cares about the poor and needy. And if we are kingdom people here this morning, then we ought to care for the physically needy as well. Now, as mostly middle class folks here this morning, we can find it a bit awkward thinking about giving to those who have less than us.

And we quickly point to the social problems that might complicate our giving to the needy. And sure, there is wisdom in not going down to the homeless shelter and handing out big wads of cash to

everyone there. But Jesus' command to give includes giving to those who have less than us. And we must pray for godly discernment so that we might know how best we can help those who are in need. But the spiritually needy are almost certainly in view here too. And the Bible says that our greatest need is that we have impoverished souls. The Bible says that our natural state before God is spiritual bankruptcy. When Jesus looked out upon the crowds that he was teaching, he had compassion on them.

Because they were like sheep without a shepherd. They were lost. They were harassed. And they were in need of a shepherd to rescue them and care for them and lead them home. So what does giving for the sake of someone's spiritual need look like? Well, I think it means giving so that people who don't yet know about Jesus have the opportunity to hear about him and respond to his call to trust in him.

Now here at Bruntsfield Evangelical Church, we're committed to supporting the physical and spiritual needs of people in this city and around the world. And we do this by running initiatives like the Food Bank and using church funds to donate to charities like the Fairy Well Youth Project. If you've been around, you've probably heard a bit about that. And partnering with university Christian unions and partnering with people in other parts of the world who are seeking to build up Jesus' kingdom where they are. Now this is not a salesman's trick to get you to give to the church. But we would encourage you to prayerfully consider giving to the church if you are a member here, if you're a regular here, and partnering with us as we seek to support the needy. Maybe that's one way of reaching those needs.

[13 : 48] And as Christians, we are motivated to give as we remember our saviour, Jesus, and his most generous act of giving. Giving of himself to save lost people and give them new life. And in new creation, when God's kingdom will be fully and finally unveiled, there will be no more physical or spiritual neediness. For God's people will dwell with him, the creator and sustainer of life.

So kingdom people give to the needy. And secondly now, kingdom people give for a greater reward. Now we've seen that followers of Jesus should give, but Jesus' main concern here in this passage is how his followers should give. And we read that in verse 2.

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. Now, I'm not sure if these people were actually using trumpets to announce their giving to the world. They might have been. We don't know. But I think Jesus is making the point that men and women who claim to be followers of God were going the extra mile to show off their giving. Their giving is loud. Their giving is very public. It's designed to impress people.

But why bring out the trumpets? Why go the extra mile to impress people? Well, so that these people might receive the honour of the world, the honour of the watching folks round about them. The folks that will say, oh man, what a holy guy. Did you see the way that they just gave there? Now, just a bit of a made-up story here. I wonder if you can imagine one morning at church.

[15 : 55] A church is doing a fundraising appeal for needy children. And after the pastor announces the appeal, one member of the congregation gets up. We'll call her Muriel this morning. I don't know if we've got any Muriels, but I've picked that name so that I wouldn't offend anybody here this morning. But we'll call her Muriel.

And she comes up to the stage and she announces into the mic. Now, I would just like to say, it is my wonderful pleasure this morning to donate to the needy children fund a cheque for £1,000. And the church explodes with applause. People are whipping and cheering. And someone even comes up and takes a photo of Muriel holding her cheque. And everyone says, wow, Muriel, you are clearly very godly.

But this is not how kingdom people give. They do not announce their giving. They do not show off. And they definitely don't tell other people how much they are giving. Now, it is comical to imagine the trumpet fanfare that Jesus mentions here. But Jesus is being deadly serious. He calls people who give in this way hypocrites. They claim to love and worship God. But their giving is all about themselves. Worshipping themselves, bringing honour to themselves. And that is offensive to God.

[17 : 34] It would have been better if they hadn't given anything at all. And as well as redirecting praise away from God to yourself, showy giving is really bad because it would compel other people to give in this way as well. Now, some people would be puffed up more and more with pride as they showed off their giving to other people. But other people would feel ashamed because they wouldn't be able to give as much as the showy givers. This is bad news, this type of giving. Jesus warns at

the end of verse 2 that such people have received the reward already. Now, in my made-up story about Muriel, the praise she received from the congregation and the write-up that she received in the church bulletin, that would be all the praise that she would receive. There would be no praise from God. Her offering meant nothing to God.

It was a completely empty gesture because she sought to bring honour to herself and not to God. But how does Jesus want his followers to give? How should kingdom people give? Well, we read in verse 3, 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. Kingdom people give so discreetly that not even a person's left hand knows what the person's right hand is giving. Now, again, I think this might be a bit of hyperbole going on here.

Of course, you've got one brain, two hands but one brain. Surely you know what the other hand is doing. But Jesus is making the point that kingdom people give quietly. Kingdom people give secretly.

Giving is a private matter between you and God. Kingdom giving doesn't draw attention to itself. No one else needs to know. And verse 4 continues, Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Jesus teaches his followers that kingdom, sorry, that God sees what his people give. God sees what his people give. Kingdom people should give quietly. Kingdom people should give secretly.

[20:11] But actually, there's nothing secret about their giving because our heavenly Father sees and knows. And the promise is, in this passage, that he will reward his people who give in this way.

Kingdom people give for a reward which is hidden and immeasurable. And we can't be sure what this reward looks like. But it should motivate us to give.

This heavenly reward. Now, I wonder if you are giving. And maybe you've found this yourself.

Maybe you've thought this. It's actually quite hard to give towards something that we can't quantify. What is our giving really doing? What difference is it actually making? Why should I bother giving at all? Well, one thing that we can be sure of is that when we give, we know that it brings a smile to God's face.

He delights when we choose to worship God through our giving. And this is our motivation to give. Knowing that it delights our heavenly Father.

[21:23] And when the kingdom of heaven is fully and finally unveiled, when we will see it with our eyes, we will know exactly what he means by this reward.

Now, I have a friend here who is sharing a story with me this week about another Christian who decided to come up to them and slip them £100 in cash.

Just slipped it into their back pocket and said, This isn't for the weekly food shop. This is so that you and your family can go and buy some new Bibles.

You know, that is important to me. It's important that you and your family have some nice new Bibles for you to read and enjoy and to learn about the Lord from.

And yeah, this friend was just sharing with me that, you know, just how impacted they were by that gesture. And that kingdom giving, this person felt the need just to bless this brother of theirs and to give them some money.

[22:31] And, you know, we won't know who that person is that gave the money. I certainly don't know who it is. But God knows and God sees that kind of giving. It is small, it is quiet, it is secret.

But God knows and God is pleased when people give in that sort of way. So as we wrap up, let me leave you with just a few questions to ponder.

Oh, that's the cash. That's actually £80, it's not £100. But I couldn't find an image that had £100. But finally, yeah, two questions for you to ponder.

First of all, do you have too high a view of your giving? Are you proud of your giving? Are you proud of how much you're giving?

Is that a thought that crops into your mind? Wouldn't it be great for everyone to know how much it costs you to support the needy?

[23:34] How much it costs you to give to the church? Maybe you have entertained some of these thoughts. And Jesus warns you this morning, flee from such thoughts.

But maybe, more likely, maybe you have too low a view of your giving. Are you giving with your eyes set on the kingdom?

Does the thought of God's glorious smile motivate you to give and to keep giving? Are you intentional about your giving?

Do you ever give any thought to your monthly bank transfer, which silently slips out of your account?

Have you forgotten that your giving is your worship? Are you praying about your giving?

[24 : 33] Are you praying that it will accomplish what it has been given for? I'll just leave you with these sorts of questions to mull over yourselves.

Maybe it's something you can chat about over tea and coffee. Not about how much you're giving, but, you know, obviously. But maybe in a way that you have personally been challenged by this. Even just as Christian brothers and sisters, are we intentional? I think nowadays it's just so easy to set up a bank transfer. At least that's, you know, something that I find a bit easier to do.

And I do not give it a moment's thought on the first of the month. But I know that I should. And I know that I should be praying that God will accomplish with it what it has been sent to do.

But please join me just now as I pray and as we ask God to help us view our giving with kingdom-focused eyes. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we come before you humbly.

[25 : 41] We come before you and thank you for your word. Just these four verses, Lord, about giving. And yet how much your spirit challenges us and convicts us as we think about our giving.

Thank you, Lord, that we do not have to show off our giving. We do not have to make a big show. Because you, our Father in heaven, knows exactly what we are doing.

You see everything that is done in secret. And you are pleased when we choose to give. Lord, I pray that you would help us to be motivated to give to needy folk, Lord.

Help us not just to think about the spiritually needy, Lord, but help us also to think about the physically needy, Lord, as well. And, Lord, it just takes a few minutes of walking down our street to see folk that are in need.

And, Lord, would you give us wisdom to know how best to support people that are really in need.

And, Lord, would we remember Jesus' wonderful, most generous act of self-giving on the cross to save us from our sin and to give us new life.

[26 : 56] And that we will no longer be spiritually needy if we are seeking you and are found in you.

So, Lord, would you motivate us as well to go out with the gospel and to share it with those who don't yet know it.

We ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen.