



HG208: The Sermon On The Mount
Motives Of The Heart

Matthew 6:1-18

Home Group Study Notes

25 October 2020 - James Van Cleef



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

Imagine that a successful vaccine for Covid-19 has been found, and face masks and social distancing are no more. What's the first thing you would do?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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A Digression at the Start!

In Genesis, the first command given to the man was to eat of every tree in the garden except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, *'for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'* (Genesis 2.17). At its essence, this is a command to know God alone, that is, knowledge of God through relational experience. This is to honour God, the giver of life.

The serpent twists the command, the sole intent being to draw humans away from the glory of God. The serpent, full of lies, envy and hatred, corrupts the beauty and liberty of God's command, and brings death, through the seed of covetousness: 'God is withholding something good from you.' The first Adam covets. Subsequently, death reigns...

In the wilderness, Jesus has fasted forty days and nights, and is hungry. The adversary—the serpent—comes to twist the command of God, to draw the Son of God away from honouring the Father, for if the Son falters, then there will be no hope for humanity. At each turn, Jesus aligns his will with the Father, seeking only His glory, for he knows that the Father withholds nothing from him. Even at the Crucifixion, the Son knows the Father withholds nothing, and he submits to the Father's will. The second Adam's righteousness brings life for all...

In Preparation

In Matthew 6.1-18, we are faced with the question of the motives of our heart. So, before we share in God's written word, made visible by the Living Word, let us pray for illumination through the Holy Spirit.

'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and test the mind...' (Jeremiah 17.9-10 ESV)

*'Investigate my life, O God, find out everything about me;
Cross-examine and test me, get a clear picture of what I'm about;
See for yourself whether I've done anything wrong
then guide me on the road to eternal life'*

(Psalm 139.23-24 MSG)

The Altar Ego: The Church is Your Stage?

The teaching of Jesus in Matthew 6.1-18 is not given as a formula for us to determine who is playing a religious game, who is being a hypocrite. I would go so far as to suggest that we find no such diagnosing formulas in Scripture. We have neither the wisdom nor the ability to determine other people's hearts. True, we may see the fruit others produce, but we cannot read the intent of their heart. However, we know our heart, our motives, whether we are right with God or not. Therefore Jesus is challenging you and me directly: beware of parading your religion before others, for if you seek honour from others, you will lose honour from the Father. Beware the 'altar ego' and making the church a stage...

Alter the Ego

Jesus gives three examples of piety that were common to Judaism: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Indeed, these are common to many religions, including Christianity. The issue is not engaging in acts of piety, but doing so 'in order to be seen by people,' that is, to give to the poor, etc., so as to be applauded or honoured by others.

As followers of Jesus, we are not to have an 'altar ego.' We are not to seek an honour from people that gives us a sense of identity and importance.

Why is this? All honour comes from God, who alone is worthy of all honour. As humans, our honour—our significance, worth and distinction—is given freely by God. We are made in his image. As we are in Christ, we are new creations and the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5.16-21). Through Jesus we are adopted as sons of God, heirs of the Kingdom. And so we are empowered to live out that image: to be compassionate, to be aware of others, to love wholly, and to seek the glory of God. This honours him.

But, when the ego gets in the way, we lose sight of God's honour and glory, and so lose sight of our worth. When this happens, we will start looking for it elsewhere, and when we do, we are not so much concerned with the honour of others as we are with ours. With the altar ego in overdrive our acts of piety become means by which we exalt ourselves over others, grasping for a glory from others, which in reality is an illusion. And in the end we lose the very thing we seek, and we find our lives disconnected from God.

'Accepting identity with Jesus...means rejecting identity gained by the approval of the crowd' (James M Houston, *The Transforming Friendship*). So, through the indwelling Spirit, we need to abandon the altar ego and let Jesus alter our ego.

Imitating Christ

Now, let's look at almsgiving, prayer and fasting, and how these ancient spiritual practices can alter our ego so that our lives reflect the beauty of Jesus.

Almsgiving. To give alms, to give to the needy (v 2) is to have consideration or regard for the needs of others. It is to express kindness for someone in need. Regardless if they 'deserve it' or not... Isn't this what we see in Jesus?

The ego would turn this into a photo opportunity, a way to let others know that we are generous to the less fortunate. But that would then be to have no consideration or regard for their need. So, because we are in Christ, we are to give. '*Freely you have received, freely give*' (Matthew 10.8).

We give because others are also created in the image of God, even if they believe it or not. We give because Jesus gave of himself. Not for applause or the honour of humans, but the glory of God.

Prayer. Hypocrisy in prayer is a matter saying what we do not mean. Or promising to pray but not doing it. Prayer is not a list of demands, confusing them with needs, which places us at the centre. What do we need? This past year has revealed what we can live without, and also what we truly need.

So, what do we need? Jesus teaches that our Father knows our need, so prayer primarily is not a list of requests (or demands) we bring, but to remember that:

- We need to acknowledge the majesty of God, that he is the maker of the heavens and the earth!
- We need to live in relational obedience to God's will, his purposes and desires. A key word is 'relational' for it is founded in love. God's perfect love for us is wooing us to reciprocate.
- We need to be nourished. Man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matthew 4.4). And, Jesus is the Bread of Life. God gives us both physical and spiritual bread. Both are real and essential to nourish our whole being.
- We need to be forgiven. We need to forgive, to release or let go the debt. And we need to remember that we are forgiven *as we forgive*. How does God forgive us? *How* do we forgive? How we forgive unequivocally demonstrates if we reflect the image of Jesus or not.

Prayer is the 'journey from illusion to truth' (Parker J Palmer, *The Promise of Paradox*) and leads us away from our ego into the heart of God. Lack of prayer is self-reliance and leads to ignorance of God. Can we afford to not pray?

Fasting. To fast is to abstain from those things that draw our attention away from Jesus. It is usually food, and to break from food may remind us of our Western excess, but more so the lack that millions face because of greed. However, fasting is not wholly about that, nor a way for us to draw attention to the plight of others.

Our lives are full of distractions and we need to stop talking, stop the noise, stop the visual overload so that we may truly listen and see. We need to recapture a Sabbath rhythm so that we can learn to empty ourselves of ego in order that we are filled with the Spirit of Jesus.

Let's pause, and see a pattern: Almsgiving—how we relate to others. Prayer—how we relate to God. Fasting—how we relate to ourselves. Or to use the words of Jesus: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself*" (Matthew 22.37-40 ESV).

Now let's overlay this pattern with Jesus' temptations in the wilderness: turn stones to bread to satiate his hunger; to test the faithfulness of God by throwing himself from the temple; to receive the glory of the world's kingdoms by bowing down before the adversary (see Matthew 4.1-11).

Simply put, the temptations challenged how he related to himself, how he related to the Father, and how he related to others. And Jesus triumphs because in all aspects his whole being is centred on the Father. So we can join in the imitation of Christ!

Shh! Don't tell anyone!

People will actually see us giving to others, or praying, or even fasting. These have been core practices of the Body of Christ since Jesus' ascension and Pentecost. They are indicative of Kingdom life, which is always lived out in public; a city on a hill cannot be hid. But our 'righteousness' is not done for them; we do them in secret—that is, to be before, or in the face of the Father, who is in secret—not recognisable by the public.

Though all creation shows the glory of the Lord (Psalm 19), not everyone is prepared to see or acknowledge that truth. But we know and can see that all we are comes from God, so it is right that all we do—because of who we are in Christ—is brought to God alone, for a self-serving world does not comprehend the upward call of Jesus to lose our life in order to find life. And the honour we bring to God, God gives to us.

So, let us finish where we began: in the silence, before the Father, let us pray:

*Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!*

(Psalm 139.23-24 ESV)

Emmanuel Church Text for 2020

*“The Lord Your God is with you. He is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with
His love. He will rejoice over you with singing.”*

Zephaniah 3:17



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. We 'learn' Jesus by 'living' Jesus - like how an apprentice learns their skill or trade. Discuss how these three acts (giving alms, praying, and fasting) help us live like Jesus.

2. '*Freely you have received, freely give*' (Matthew 10.8). What are ways we might freely give?

3. '*Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.*' Discuss: a) how important forgiving others is if we are to reveal Jesus, and b) the transformation that takes place because of being forgiven.

4. From what might we need to fast, and how can we recapture a ‘Sabbath rhythm’?

5. The essence of Christ-like living is wholly loving God and loving our neighbours as ourselves. How easy is it to love yourself?

6. An exercise for the days ahead: In ‘secret’ with Jesus, spend time in silence. Then say to yourself, ‘Jesus, you are the beloved.’ Rest in his presence, and then when you’re ready, say to yourself, ‘Jesus, I am the beloved.’ Again rest, and then say to yourself, ‘Jesus, all are beloved.’ Use this to help you see how Jesus sees...



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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