

The Sermon on the Mount (2)

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[0 : 00] Let's ask God to help us. Help us please, Father, to understand your word, that we might live to your praise and glory. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

This morning I looked at the Sermon on the Mount as a whole. Tonight I want to just continue for those who are with us this morning, in looking at a particular part, and for those of us who are unable to be with us this morning, to pick up on one section of the Sermon on the Mount to capture the middle of what the Sermon is about.

In its context, the Sermon as a whole is a warning. A warning to the disciples about popularity. A warning to the disciples about false prophets and false ministry.

A warning to the disciples that as they become the disciples of Jesus to fish for men, they are going to into conflict, hostility, rejection, rebellion, because they are, although it is not spelled out yet, following the crucified one.

And so it's a different message than the kind of popularity that you see at the end of chapter 4. In particular, it's a challenge to do the will of your Father who is in heaven.

[1 : 23] That to be a disciple means that you will be different, distinctively, authentically, unmistakably different from the society around about you.

But the character of that difference is that you will be doing those good works which will bring glory to your Father who is in heaven. Chapter 5, verse 16.

If you would open up there, chapter 5, verse 16. Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Now, these good works are the fulfilment of the law and the prophets. And so he goes on immediately, chapter 5, verse 17. And I do wish that Bible publishers didn't treat us all like children and keep putting these headings in and breaking it up so that we think something new is being said when it's a continuation.

Do not think that I've come to abolish the law and the prophets. I've not come to abolish them, but to fulfil them. Indeed, you mustn't relax the least of the law, but you must do that which the law called upon you to do and the prophets have called upon you to do.

[2 : 37] Indeed, verse 20 is one of the most striking verses for that generation. For us, we skip straight past it. But for verse 20, when Jesus first said that, I guarantee people were rocked back on their heels.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. The Pharisees were really an intertestamental group.

You don't find them in the Old Testament. They arose between the Old and the New Testament. They were the middle class, lay, hardworking businessmen of the community.

I don't know which groups you have here. Lions, apex, rotary, kind of good citizens, model, moral citizens of the community. But they were a little bit weird in that they had a particular fetish.

And their fetish was law-keeping. They really believed in keeping the law. Right down to the most minute details, they would keep the law.

[3 : 42] In fact, nearly only the details did they keep and missed the whole point. But that was not seen by Jesus' contemporaries. There was no one who was more concerned about law-keeping than the Pharisees.

So when Jesus says, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, it would have sounded in his day like nobody could get in.

Because how could you exceed the Pharisees? I mean, these were the people who were the fanatics on law-keeping. How could you exceed them? And chapters 5, verse 21, through to chapter 7, verse 11, is telling you about how to fulfil the law and the prophets in a way that far

exceeds anything any Pharisee had ever even thought of.

For the essence of Pharisaic law-keeping was minimisation and hypocrisy.

The minimisation you see in the second half of chapter 5. At every point where the law spoke, they were looking for the loophole. They were looking to minimise the requirements of what the law says.

[4 : 57] So it says, you shall not commit adultery. Well, a good classic Pharisee of the 20th century was Bill Clinton. I have not had sexual relations with that woman.

But when it was all spelt out, it just meant that he actually hadn't had a certain form of sexual relationships with that woman. But he did all kinds of other things sexually in relationship with that woman.

But he didn't technically break the law in his eyes. And Jesus says, if you look with lust, you have already committed adultery in your heart.

There are translation problems of that and another time, another sermon, we can look at what it means to look with lust. But the point that Jesus is driving at is very clear.

It's not just the last technical point of intercourse that makes it adultery. The heart's desires. They have already indicated adultery.

[6 : 03] Jesus does the reverse of the Pharisees. The Pharisee wants to minimise the law requirements to find every loophole by which he can get his way through. Whereas Jesus maximises the law's implications.

It calls upon us to a new level of real law-keeping, obedience from the heart, far in excess of anything a Pharisee wanted. You see, a real tax accountant, lawyer in the city of Glasgow, who has, as a man or a woman, integrity in their work, will still, in their integrity to keep the law, be trying to find every conceivable deduction and loophole available.

Won't they? Because that's what they're paid to do. I mean, who pays a tax consultant to find more ways to pay tax? The very reason you approach them is to find less ways to pay tax.

And yet, some are not shonky, shady, immoral dealers. Some of them are people of real integrity who say, no, no, we can't do that because that breaks the law.

But we could do this. Have you ever thought of this? Why don't you rearrange your finances this way? Because that would genuinely minimise your taxation. Because the purpose of the tax consultant is to avoid tax.

[7 : 34] That's the purpose, isn't it? Down in Australia, we pay some of the cleverest people, because you've really got to be clever to get into tax law, we pay some of the cleverest people in our land to make sure that rich people don't pay taxes.

It's not the most kind of sensible way to deploy human brain power. I mean, employing them in engineering or plumbing might be more sensible as helpful for the community, but no, we employ...

I'm sorry if you're one of them here. But there is the issue of what Pharisaism is about. It's tax avoidance. It's law avoidance while having all the appearance of law keeping.

It's not law breaking. It's law avoidance. That's what they were. And Jesus says, no, you can look like you're keeping the law while at the same time breaking the law.

So you can divorce and remarry and divorce and remarry and divorce and remarry and say, I believe in monogamy. I've never had two wives at the same time.

[8 : 42] I've always only had one at a time. And I'm against adultery. I've never committed... I've never had sexual relationships with a woman that I haven't been married to. I've been married to eight or nine.

But I've never had sex with someone outside of marriage. Or I believe in faithfulness and fidelity in marriage. I just always am faithful to the wife at the present time.

That is, you see, Pharisaism. I've kept the law while at the same time avoiding what it's saying.

Hand in glove with that kind of law keeping and law avoidance is then show and appearance.

And that's the part of the argument we look at tonight in chapter 6. Practicing righteousness. As he calls it there in chapter 6, verse 1.

Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them for then you'll have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. For that kind of Pharisaic law keeping wants appearances to be right.

[9 : 48] And Jesus is saying, no, no. Do not do it for appearances sake. Now, this is a kind of funny contrast with 5.16, isn't it? 5.16 is in a sense the real topic sentence of the sermon.

Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven. And now in 6.1 he says, do not practice your righteousness so as to be seen.

Now, which is it? Am I supposed to do it so as to be seen or am I not supposed to do it so as to be seen? Well, it's both. That's why Jesus says both. I must so act that when people see my works they will glorify God, not me.

And therefore, I must not so act in such a way that I am putting my good works on public display so as to be seen by others. for if I genuinely do that which is righteous it's like a city hidden a city on a hill.

It will not be able to be hidden. But I must never do it in order to be seen. I must do it because it is right.

[11:02] If you do it because it is right the truth will out and people will glorify my Father in heaven. But if I do it in order to be seen the truth will be out and people will say what a wonderful person Philip Jensen is.

And that of course is the exact reverse of 516. And so beware he says of doing your righteousness in such a way that people will see.

And he gives three illustrations alms giving prayer fasting but the general principle is laid out therefore in verse 1 beware of doing it before others in order to be seen by them.

Good works will bring glory to God but doing it for the purpose of being seen is not right.

Even though it might be a right thing to do the motive now is very wrong. Remember the difference between a motive and an action and that motives actually qualify actions enormously don't they?

[12:16] You can do good things for bad reasons and when you do good things for bad reasons they become bad things. My brother and I used to live as small children next door to a block of flats for three stories high we lived in a little bungalow with my parents and my mother was an extraordinary woman of enormous ferocity.

We lived in constant feet no we didn't she loved us enormously but we certainly knew our place. When it was jump it was only ever how high you never queried whether you did or didn't it was just how high do I jump this time and so there were two elderly ladies who lived on the top floor of the block of flats and they often went for holidays and when they came home if ever they were seen my mother would delegate us to carry their bags up to the top floor.

Now if you lived on the middle floor you would say those Jensen boys are such lovely boys look at the way they carry the bags for the old ladies up to the top floor. If you lived on the top floor you would say one of those Jensen boys is really nice but you notice the other one always takes the money.

If you lived on the bottom floor you would say that Mrs Jensen she's training those boys properly because they don't want to do it ever. The motive is different on each level.

we never wanted to carry bags up for old ladies what a ridiculous idea and so I won't mention who took the money but the motive qualifies the action.

[13:57] If you do even a good thing for bad motives it is a bad thing that you do and there is the problem you see doing it in order to be seen.

Beware says chapter 6 verse 1 you will have no reward from your father. Now throughout this little section there are discussions of rewards or mention of rewards and so what are the rewards?

Unfortunately rewards in our worldly pattern are irrational and stupid. Because I can run 100 metres faster than you which means that you're over 75 because I can run 100 metres faster than you they will give me a silver cup.

What has a silver cup got to do with running 100 metres faster than anybody else? Why do we give silver cups? What are they there for except to provide jobs for cleaning ladies?

They are silly things aren't they? Or they give you a gold medal. Or the one I laugh at at the Olympics these days that came in a few years ago. They give you a bunch of flowers.

[15:04] Australian men are not really good on a bunch of flowers. Not even carrying them for our ladies. In fact it's only a demonstration of love that we would ever carry them for ladies. But I love it when you see the weight lifters, the super heavy weight lifters being given a bunch of posies.

What on earth do they do with this? And what do they do with a gold medal? Fortunately they tend not to be of such intellectual calibre as to worry about it. But the reward has nothing to do with the activity.

At least in school rewards, if you come first in English literature, they give you a book. But if you become first in maths, they give you a book.

As if someone who's a mathematician has ever read a book. That's the last thing they want. But they give you things that have got nothing to do with the activity. So when we think of rewards, what is my reward?

I'm going to give you a hundred thousand pounds. Why would I need money? Because I did the right thing. What is reward? the reward that we are seeking is glory for God.

[16:13] That is the reward because we let our light so shine before men that they may see our good works glory. And give glory to our Father who is in heaven. If when I do things God has given glory then I have received my reward in heaven.

Or the reward also can be that there will be a fulfilment of the purpose of my action. So when I give money to those who are in need, what is the purpose?

It's to alleviate their need. need. That's the purpose. And so if in the alleviation of their need God blesses the work by alleviating their need then I've got my reward.

I wanted them to be better off. When I pray what is my purpose? To be heard by God. If as a result of praying this way I am heard by God then I have my reward.

Because the reward is much more connected to the task that is there. But what's the reward of the hypocrite? Because they also receive their reward. Well the reward of the hypocrite is that people think well of them.

[17:26] When in fact they shouldn't be thought well of at all. So if I give in such a way that you will think I am generous, well then you will think I'm generous.

That I've received my reward. The person to whom I'm given may not be helped by my gift and the Father in heaven is not impressed by my gift and no glory comes to him because of my gift.

Everybody says isn't that Philip Jensen a generous man? And I walk around thinking I am, aren't I? And so I have received my reward. It's illustrated with these three acts of righteousness.

Three acts that were common and normal for Jewish law keeping. And I have worked out a three word summary of what Jesus is saying here which I will share with you now and repeatedly till you go home remembering it.

Secrecy safeguards sincerity. Secrecy safeguards sincerity.

[18:37] Not a little phrase to use if you have a list. Secrecy safeguards sincerity.

That's what Jesus is saying. Now if you don't think sincerity matters forget it. But Jesus does. And the actions he's calling upon you to do are not in themselves right but they are right in protecting your sincerity.

That's why it safeguards it. And each of the activities that Jesus speaks of here is an activity of secrecy. Look at verses 2 to 4 in almsgiving.

Don't worry about the trumpets and whether they did or didn't have trumpets in the ancient world and did or didn't blow them. The point is more important than the historical background that you may or may not come to.

The point is very simple really isn't it? Give in order to be praised is hypocrisy because you look like you're giving when in fact what you're doing is taking the praise of others.

[19:45] You look like you're generous but what you're doing is receiving honour. And so it's hypocrisy because what it looks like is not what it is in fact.

Giving like that is very common isn't it? The public relations departments of most firms are involved in exactly that activity aren't they? They give in such a way, in such a time, in such a place that people will think well of the organisation, of the company.

That's what they're doing. The naming rights on hospital buildings, you know, this building's wing has been given by. Well, the man who does that has his reward.

Everybody looks and says that building was given by. And that's all there was to it. He has earned, he has paid for public goodwill. It was advertising.

It was not benefaction. A benefactor would have done it secretly because he wanted the building. A hypocrite does it publicly because he wants the public reputation and regard.

[20:56] And so he is advertised. That's all he has done. And to give a scholarship in your name. To have listed the donors.

You get more money this way. But it doesn't actually help the giver to be genuine. There is a community down in Sydney, it happens to be the Jewish community, which publish each year a

book of their benefactions, listing every name and how much they have given.

And of course the Jewish community in Sydney is a large but well known intermarrying community, everybody knows everybody. And so immediately the book comes out each year, we all look it up to see how much this person has given and that person has given.

We can actually have last year's book and see whether they are giving more or giving less. You know that you are doing that with everybody else, so you know that everybody else is doing it with you too, so you make sure you give enough to give the impression that business is going well this year and that you are still part of the community and it is a wicked and evil form of manipulation by which you get much more money out of people than if you didn't publish it, which is why the organisers do it, but which reinforces hypocrisy in the life of givers.

But it's done in many ways. There are many old church buildings. I haven't looked on the way in here so I hope this is not true, which have out the front in the hall the benefactors who put in the money to build the building in the first place.

[22 : 31] It's not there, is it? But you'll go around Britain and you'll find many a church which will tell you who they were 300 years ago but their name is still there. So and so, so and so. Esquire gave two pounds, ten shillings to the building of this building.

He has his reward. There are all kinds of people, hundreds of years later who are going to walk by someone who he was. He has his reward. It's of no value but he has it.

He got his day. A couple of years ago was it? It was the last year. It all merges after you get old doesn't it? We had the tsunami go through South East Asia.

Australia being right down there on the doorstep I was very conscious of our next door neighbours being killed in huge numbers. our government raced out into bringing aid and help to which I was glad.

It was right. Even though we don't necessarily have good relationships with some of these neighbours it was still a right thing to do because the human suffering of this catastrophe, one of the biggest catastrophes of our lifetime, it was right that we raised money and we helped in the reconstruction of those countries.

[23 : 43] It was perfectly right to do it but in order to really raise money, all the companies were put under pressure to make donations, all the public companies and of course when they did they made sure that their name was out there that we gave one million dollars and we gave one million dollars and we gave five million, we gave ten million and big cricket match was held and in the big cricket match every CEO of a big company was dragged out in front of the cameras and asked how much his company was being donating and enormous amount of money came in as a result of this totally manipulative mechanism of hypocrisy because if you weren't asked, if you weren't of public notoriety, if you just sat at home and sent five bucks in, it had nothing to do with me, it was over there.

I mean the idea of anonymous giving, every now and then we run telephones, do you run telephones here? 24 hours of television where people ring up and say, I'll give two pounds, I'll give three pounds, I'll give thirty shillings, I'll give, and so, but my name is read out all over the land and I don't even have to send the money in, I just get my name read out.

The Pharisees are alive and well, friends, and even, sadly, in Christian organisations. This Pharisaic character of people sending receipts, publishing names, letting it be known how much has been given.

That's not what Jesus says. Give in order to give. That's why you give. And therefore keep it secret. That's how you do it. Secret, even Jesus says, from yourself.

Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. You can go into background as to what this may mean or not mean, but the point of it is clear. Don't even keep records so that you won't be tempted to pat yourself on the back and say, well, I really am a generous person.

[25 : 51] Forget what you have given. You've given it now. It's over. It's done. Forget about it. Move on. Don't keep reminding yourself how well you have done.

You've given. You've given because the person to whom you're given needed it. It was the right thing to do. Pray God that the gift will be a blessing to them and move on.

Forget it. Forget that you've done it. And your father will reward you because the needy will be helped. And God will be praised. Christ. And you will become like God.

Generous. That's a terrific blessing. If you wanted to give me a reward, make me like God. That's a terrific reward, isn't it?

And if you become genuinely generous from your heart, then at least in that characteristic, you'll be like God. What better blessing could we have than that?

[26 : 54] God. But if you give all the time so that people will notice, you won't be like God. You'll miss the reward completely. Now let me skip across to the third of the illustrations Jesus uses, the fasting one, because it's much the same as the giving one.

We are not required to fast. There's nothing wrong with doing it. But within the practice of religion of Israel, there were fast days. And there is also within the prophetic word, Isaiah 58 for example, that God says he doesn't desire the fasting that they did.

The fasting God desires is that people would give up sin. You know, people giving up ice cream for Lent, if they wanted to practice such silly practices, really misses the point totally and completely, doesn't it?

God's not interested in you giving up ice creams or giving up carbohydrates or giving up... God is interested in you giving up sin. Give up wickedness. Overcome witnesses.

Feed the hungry. That's why you can fast in Isaiah 58. You fast because it's a matter of being humbled before the God in repentance and grieving because you're so overwhelmed by the knowledge of your sinfulness that you are sick to the stomach and do not want to eat.

[28 : 16] That's a reason for fasting. fasting. You fast because you know that others need the money that you are spending. Some friends of mine have been ministering in southern India among some Christians there and several of the people that they were involved in living with them, they discovered they only ate every second day because the community of the Christians were so impoverished and poor that even though they may be able to afford to eat every day, it wouldn't be a right thing to do.

They need to share their limited resources with the others and so they were only eating every second day. That's genuine fasting. Fasting in order to be generous, in order to help the community, in order to look after the needy and the poor and the destitute.

There is fasting. The Jewish concern for fast days, for obligation days, for fulfilling the fast in such a way that everybody knew about it.

Well, Jesus' concern is sincerity and the way to safeguard sincerity is secrecy.

In the Catholic tradition, be it the Anglo-Catholic tradition or the Roman Catholic condition, on the first day of Lent, the 40 days before Easter, Ash Wednesday is celebrated as the beginning of the fasting season and celebrated by putting a smudge of ashes on the forehead.

[29 : 46] And so people walk around on Ash Wednesday with this little dirty smudge on their forehead and everybody says, you haven't washed your face, you looked in the mirror, you know, little problem there.

And they say, oh no, no, no, I'm fasting. Because the little smudge is a little advertisement. I am fasting. It's the exact reverse of what Jesus is saying, isn't it?

Precise reverse. When you fast, wash your face, do your hair, don't appear like you're fasting at all. And then the reason for which you're fasting, to give to the needy, to be humble before God, to be repentant, that will be rewarded.

I suggested to you a while ago that the idea of safeguarding sincerity is that you're not doing it because this thing is right in itself, but because it safeguards sincerity.

That is, a friend of mine who's now dead and in glory publicly told us to his great embarrassment, but to our great merriment, about how he went with a friend, a couple of friends, on a walking tour of New Zealand on a university holiday.

[31 : 04] And they were reading the Sermon on the Mount and it says here that what you are to do is to anoint your head and to wash your face. So that's what they did. They got brill cream, which was the oil of the day, and plastered their hair down because it says to anoint their eyes and they really polished up their faces.

And he said it was really interesting because they kept on bumping into people because Australians and New Zealanders always bump into people they know. And every time they bump, people say, what have you done with your hair? I'm fasting. You see, they've fulfilled the letter and missed the point, haven't they?

It's not that you must anoint your head when you fast. It's just be normal when you fast. If you normally anoint your hair, then do.

If you normally don't, then don't. But just be normal so that no one will know what you're doing. The longer section, 5 to 15, is about prayer.

Again, the principle is the same. Secrecy, safeguards, sincerity. When you're praying, what are you doing?

[32 : 18] You're asking God. I've written a book recently on the subject of prayer, or rather, somebody has written a book for me and put my name on the front of it because I'm incompetent at reading books, but still my name goes on the front.

I don't know whether it's on your bookstore, but it will be soon, I'm sure, called Prayer and the Voice of God. Now, one of the things that we discovered in researching for this book on prayer was the discovery that the word prayer, and there are several different Greek words and several different Hebrew words, but every one of the words that are used for prayer mean asking.

That's what prayer is. That's why when you pray, you've got to pray with thanksgiving, because thanksgiving is not prayer, because prayer is asking. So when you ask, ask with thanksgiving. But prayer is never meditation. That's thinking in the Bible. Whenever it uses the word meditation, it means thinking. It doesn't mean being a Buddhist and stop thinking, because that's what Buddhism is.

You empty your head of anything so that you can come to all. But in the Bible, meditating is thinking. Praying is asking. I pray you'll stay tonight for tea and coffee afterwards.

[33 : 32] See, I just asked you. It's not even asking God. It just means asking. Prayer can be used of one person asking another person, as it can be used of asking God. So when I'm asking God, then I need to pray to God.

I need to ask him. And in asking him, I will receive the reward. He will hear my request. And if it is according to his will, he will grant my request, because I asked him. I do not have, because I do not ask.

I ask in order to receive. But of course, hypocrisy is there, isn't it? You can look like you're talking to God in such a way as you make sure that everybody else hears you.

Well, at that point, you're not actually talking to God. You're talking to everybody else. And you look like you're asking God for something, but what you're doing is asking everybody else to see that you are a pious, godly, holy person.

Public prayer is a fairly dangerous and difficult thing to do, isn't it? Because you can pray in such a way as to be spiritually impressive to other people.

[34 : 38] Therefore, the length of your prayer would be very important. The extent of your Elizabethan language is very important. The extent to which you can just allude to Bible passages as if you know the whole Bible is very important.

The depth of your emotions when you pray is important. Your bodily posture and your tone of voice, oh God, please, is very important.

Anything that will impress the human hearer becomes important because you're no longer asking God anything. You're just trying to impress others and you'll get your reward.

They'll be impressed. And what use is other people being impressed by your godly piety when you have none? It really is a very empty and hollow impression that you are causing.

No. Secrecy is commanded. Privately pray. Go into your room.

[35 : 48] Close the door. And make your requests known to your Father in heaven who hears your requests in heaven and will reward you. Reward you by listening and answering your prayers.

The King James Version of the Bible, which is a terrific translation of the Bible, but unfortunately is now, requires a translation from 17th century English into 21st century English and so is not much use to us anymore, says that you are to go into your closet and pray.

A young man I know who is no longer a young man, a young man I know read that and so always had his quiet times in his wardrobe.

It was one of those oddities, you see. His family found him in the wardrobe with a torch and his Bible praying. And so he did this regularly and consistently and his family kept on hearing the noises from the wardrobe and knew that he was having his prayer time.

And so the very activity which is supposed to safeguard sincerity because it's secret became within the family the sign that he was praying.

[37 : 12] Another friend I knew who was converted, an English girl and that might explain this one, she lived in a household where the doors were never shut.

Everybody left the doors open. It was a kind of free-ranging house, you see. When she became a Christian, the only Christian in the family, she read this and she shut her door every time she wanted to pray.

And so at first the parents burst into the room. Is there something wrong? Are you sick? Is there a problem? The door is shut. What's happening? Are you keeping us out? Is this teenage rebellion? And all those kinds of stupid questions that parents inevitably ask because it's genetic.

And she would say, no, no, I'm just praying. Oh, oh, that's all. Oh, okay, okay. You're praying. Good, good. And the next day the door would be shut in. They'd burst again after a week of the door shut.

They got the drift. When the door shuts, she's praying. She wanted to convert her family so she found that she could impress them with her Christianity by just shutting the door regularly. She didn't even have to pray.

[38 : 11] She just kind of sent the message. Prayer is important. She's fulfilling the letter of what Jesus is saying and totally missing the point which is what the Pharisees did.

Isn't it fascinating? The very thing, the very passage that is written against doing it can be used to do it. Let's make sure we get the principle here. Because the principle is so important, isn't it? When we pray, we do not pray to impress others. What do you do in a restaurant? Do you pray grace in a restaurant or don't you? Whenever we receive our food, we should always be thankful to God.

But should we do it in a restaurant in front of others? Well, if you do it in order to impress others, you shouldn't. If you do it because you're thankful for your food, you should. Impress others? Oh yes. Of course you can. The restaurant's full of people and you can see they're not Christians because they didn't say grace. So Heavenly Father, we thank you for the food that we've received because you've given everything including the Lord Jesus Christ for sinners like us in a restaurant.

[39 : 16] And you didn't get a whole gospel sermon out. It's very impressive. It's not. It's not. You thank God because you're thankful. That's why. I don't have to bow my head to thank God.

I don't have to close my eyes to thank God. I don't even have to speak out loud to thank God. When I'm with a non-Christian who's actually godless and who would never thank God, I don't have to make a show of thanking God, do I?

I can say a thank you to God. I just did but you didn't see it. You see, you can do it any time anyway. It's what's on your heart.

And secrecy safeguards your sincerity. That's the point that Jesus is making in terms of our prayer. And the length of prayers.

It doesn't matter how long you pray for. God knows what you need before you've asked. You don't think you're going to get it because you've banged on the door longer and harder.

[40 : 13] Because you manipulate God. Because you can nag him into giving you something. That's not what it is like. God is not like the unjust judge in Luke's gospel. He is unlike the unjust judge.

It's not a parable of comparison. Just like the unjust judge gives in eventually when you keep asking. So God will give in eventually when you keep asking. It's saying the exact reverse.

God is not like an unjust judge. You don't have to keep asking. Ask. It will be given to you. Knock. It will be opened to you. Seek. You will find. Because God knows your needs.

And will give you every good gift. And so when you ask, you don't have to pray long winded prayers. Nor for long periods of time.

Have you not read the spiritual biographies of Luther and of Wesley? Every morning three hours in prayer. Get the little prayer desk and see the notches in the wood where they spent their time on their knees.

[41 : 13] They weren't Presbyterians. On their knees. Praying and notching their prayer. And haven't you felt, gee, I'm not a spiritual giant like them.

I'll get up tomorrow morning early and I will. You may be impressed by those biographies of Luther and Wesley. But I tell you, God wasn't impressed. And I doubt very strongly whether Luther and Wesley spent three hours in prayer because they thought the three hours were necessary in order for God to hear them.

They may have had three hours worth of praying to do. Given the big minds and the big hearts of those two men. That's why I guess they prayed.

Like that. But to write it up in a biography has been unhelpful tyranny to spiritual people for the last 100 or 200 years. I wish those biographers had just ripped that page out.

It does not help your spirituality or mine to think that God is going to be impressed by the fact that we spend two or three hours before breakfast praying for breakfast to come.

[42 : 21] You heard about the Koreans? Wonderful things have happened in Korea. Large percentage of the population have become Christians in Korea. And have you heard? They get up on prayer mountains.

They get up early in the morning up onto the mountains and they pray for three, four, five hours. We wonderfully saw some Koreans in Sydney converted. And we called a Korean pastor.

Very fine. Very fine. Lovely man. And he came, I remember, to our first staff meeting. And we asked him questions. About Korea. About Christianity. About where he stood on a whole range of issues. And sure enough, somebody said to him, What about these prayer mountains and praying like this? And he laughed. He said, yes. He said, they pray like that because they haven't been converted long.

They're still Buddhists in the way they think. Because Buddhists think they're heard for their many hours of discipline. And that now they've got this Christian God. He will need all these hours. He said, when they read their Bibles, they'll stop doing it.

[43 : 24] It was one of the great pinpricks of the balloon that I've ever seen. It just kind of suddenly you realise, I've been impressed by things that the Bible tells me are unimpressive.

But I got conned into thinking that somehow revival broke out in because they prayed for X number of hours.

It's got nothing to do with that. It's got to do with God and his generosity. And he's so generous. Because we don't have to ask for hours and hours and hours and hours and hours.

Indeed, Jesus says, when you pray, pray like this. And he gives us the Lord's Prayer, which is so short that it can be printed on the back of a stamp. It has been by lots of strange people.

I don't know why you'd want to print the Lord's Prayer on the back of a stamp, but it's been done many, many times and for vague reasons. And so you pray this prayer. Simple, straightforward, to the point prayer.

[44 : 22] Prayer. That's how you pray. Notice how you pray is what you pray. Jesus doesn't teach the disciples in Luke's Gospel how to pray by telling them, well, sit down, kneel down, stand up, hold your hands up, hold your hands down, hold this.

He doesn't say you've got to meditate, you've got to sit and kind of close in and just think of your navel or something like this. How you pray is what you pray. Because praying is just asking. How do you ask? What do you ask? These are the things you ask for. That's very simple, straightforward prayer. Six little petitions. And these are the things that should be the concerns of Christians to pray for.

And so you just pray them. And yet, within Catholicism, when people go to have their sins confessed in a confessional, the priest will sometimes give them a penance and the penance will say, you've got to say the Lord's Prayer 25 times.

The paternoster. Well, off you go. Our Father in heaven... Jesus says, you are not heard for heaping up your empty phrases.

[45 : 38] The very passage which is to teach you what to pray, simply, straightforwardly, honestly, is used by Christian hypocrites to impress God into pardoning us for our sin.

Great wickedness, isn't it? Terrible abuse of the Bible and the Lord's Prayer, and therefore our Lord. No, no, what you're to pray is the prayer of Ezekiel 36 and 37.

I won't expound the Lord's Prayer for you tonight, but it's worth expounding, and it comes from Ezekiel 36 and 37, when God's name is to be hallowed, because God's kingdom is coming, and God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And we will be given the bread of tomorrow, the living bread, and find forgiveness of our debts, and be protected, finally, from temptation, from the testing, from the evil one.

That's what it's about. You'll notice it's not actually about giving us our daily bread. The Greek is, give us today, tomorrow's bread, which always sounds a little greedy to materialists, and so we don't translate it that way.

[46 : 53] But that's what it's about. It's giving us the bread of heaven. Every petition is about the coming of the kingdom of God. It's about the gospel. It's praying the gospel. But that's another day,

and I won't be here, so Willie, I'm sure, has done it for you, and we'll do it again.

Little hint. But notice, if you're going to pray for the coming of the kingdom, then make sure you've got sin dealt with.

Make sure that you are standing forgiven. And if you're standing forgiven, you will forgive others.

And if you're not forgiving others, because you're not being forgiven.

So don't pray for the coming of the kingdom of God if you're not forgiven, because you're praying judgment upon yourself. So forgiveness will be a key element.

That's why verses 14 and 15 are there for us. All right. What's this little section of the Sermon on the Mount about? The disciples are to be different.

[47 : 59] Distinctively, radically different. They're to be different in the way of life because it will be God's way of life, not human way of life. And that difference will be seen.

It will out. It is unhideable. You can't cover it up. It will bring you persecution. People will be unhappy with you.

But you will be different. The world, therefore, doesn't understand us. It never will. It never does.

The world doesn't understand us because what we do is not what they would do or they do or they expect us to do.

And so in these three areas, which the world would call religious practices, which Jesus calls acts of righteousness, in these three areas, we Christians are completely different to the world and its expectations.

You know, in the ancient world, they persecuted Christians because we were atheists and because we were cannibals and because we practiced incest.

[49 : 07] We practiced incest because brothers and sisters in Christ married each other. They didn't understand people calling themselves brother and sister. We practiced cannibalism because we were living on the bread of life.

We were living on Jesus, eating his blood, eating his body, drinking his blood. They called us atheists because when they went into our church grottos, church meetings, etc., there were no idols anywhere.

There were no statues. There were no gods. They misunderstood us because we deal with religious realism. They deal with religious symbolism.

We deal with what is on the heart. They deal with what you can see with your eyes. We deal with sincerity. They practiced hypocrisy. Our religious activities lack flair.

They lack colour. They lack drama. They lack exhibition and exhibitionism. And so they should.

Beware, my friends, of being deceived and being seduced by more colourful, exhibitionist expressions of Christianity which are full of show.

[50 : 23] Beware of show. I understand that the word Calvin and Calvinism in Scotland today always has before it the word doer. You can never be a Calvinist.

You can only be a doer Calvinist. Praise God for that. It's a good thing to be doer because you see, it's the world misunderstanding of genuine faith in God.

For the world doesn't want something that is doer. It wants something that is expressive and outgoing and flamboyant. In the cathedral, the television stations come by frequently.

They want to photograph religious things on Easter or on Christmas or when there's a state funeral or when there's... We often are having the television come in to film our activities and they hate it because there's no visuals.

Couldn't you wear more spectacular clothes, robes? Can't you wear robes? Couldn't you get out of that black thing you're wearing? I'd love to get out of it and just get back into a normal suit or even better, a shirt and tie or even better still, just a shirt.

[51 : 39] But you see, if they go over the road to the other cathedral, well, the million robes and gowns and candles being lit and processions taking place and beautiful stained glass windows and wonderful statuary and there's real show and display and if you go over to the new kind of cathedral where people sing and dance and wave their hands and there is exhibition that is really impressive.

My friends, secrecy safeguards sincerity and sincerity is much, much more important but the world's religious desires they want to photograph us as we pray.

I say, you mustn't photograph congregation members as they pray. Of course, who do they photograph? The ones who are really intense. If you are, you are but if you're not, you're not.

But the person who just sits there normally, they never photograph because how can you be normal in church? Church is for bizarre, extraordinary, weird, but not normal, not human. That is not how you photograph religious people. Indeed, you see, our church is so boring and dull. They like to avoid us.

[53 : 04] But we're not interested in these things that they're interested in. We're interested in regeneration. We're interested in the dead coming to new life.

We're interested in the citizens of hell being raised up to become the citizens of heaven. We want to see sinners become priests. We want to see slaves to sin become kings who will rule with Christ. We want to see changed lives, not exhibitionism of spiritual superficiality. That's not what we're on about, friends.

We are for religious realism. And therefore, do not be seduced to change your ways from the Lord Jesus Christ's way.

Even though the world doesn't understand you, do not be seduced. Do not be oppressed by the super spiritual who's so impressive, who are always speaking with such spiritual fervor.

[54 : 12] Do not be impressed. I was impressed by a man, oppressed by a man. He was always more spiritual than I was. He would always greet me and, brother, how are you going with the Lord?

He was always all over me with this spirituality. His many adulterous affairs meant that he was stealing from his employer and wound up in jail.

but he was always so spiritual in his conversation and manner of life. Do not be oppressed by super spiritual people.

and do not be captured into the legalism where you start keeping all the rules without actually obeying any of them.

So that was the Pharisees. Jesus brings regeneration. We keep the law from the heart and therefore look to maximise its implications.

[55 : 23] And when we do our righteousness, we do it in a way that is genuine and real and sincere. and we watch our motives that we never do it in order to be seen by other people.

We do it to be seen by God. Well, not even to be seen by him. We do it because it's the right thing to do. But we know we will be seen by him. And if we do it rightly, we will be rewarded.

For the things that we do will be blessed by God. and we will be blessed by God. And God will be glorified by us. And that's our reward.

And what a reward it will be to think that my puny little efforts in life can bring glory to God. What a privilege.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank and praise you for everything that you do give to us and above all, we thank you for our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for his sacrifice for our sinfulness.

[56 : 35] We praise you for his resurrection. Thank you that he now sits at your right hand in all power and authority. And this night we thank you for his teaching. For the challenge to be true disciples.

Thank you for the rebuke he gives to our hypocritical hearts. Thank you for the direction he gives to us. the warning he gives to us not to do our righteousness in order to be seen by others.

Help us, Father, to so act in secrecy that our actions may be genuinely sincere. But help us, Father, be with us by your spirit to make us so much your children that we will do your acts of righteousness.

That we will in fact be doing the will of our Father, you, in heaven so that on that last day we will not hear the Lord Jesus Christ saying, depart from me, I never knew you, you worker of wickedness.

But rather, well done, you good and faithful servant. Enter into the home that is prepared for you. And we ask for this, Father, in Jesus' name.

[58 : 02] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.