

Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven

Matthew 6:1-18 | Audience of One

→ *Survey: Let's understand the background and context of the passage.*

What is the Kingdom of Heaven all about? In Matthew 5, Jesus told the Jewish people that God's Kingdom is different from what they expected. In the same way, he is revealing to them that he is the person they've been waiting for. He is the new and better Moses (their greatest prophet who brought the law), who will live up to God's standard of perfection. Jesus' followers are called to live by this same standard of perfection. But if we're honest with ourselves, we fall short of this every single day.

In the past couple of studies, Jesus taught that sin (missing the mark of perfection) isn't just the bad actions that we commit, but begins with our heart posture. He showed us how anger is the root of murder, and lust is the root of adultery. Though we may avoid certain actions, we are still subject to judgment when our hearts are in the wrong place.

As we start Chapter 6, Jesus turns from the heart behind sinful actions to the heart behind righteous actions.

His warning is clear - it is possible to do all the right things and still miss the heart of the Kingdom of Heaven. Unlike Lady Gaga, the applause is not what Kingdom people should be living for. Everything we do should be for an Audience of One - God alone. As we begin tonight's study, we're invited to examine not just what we do, but why we do it. Very quickly we'll be confronted with the reality that we often live as hypocrites - saying we believe one thing while living in another way. So what's the solution to our sinfulness?

As followers of Jesus, we can freely confront our own sin because there's good news for us in Christ: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8). While you were at your worst, God chose to love you. If you turn away from your sinfulness, your hypocrisy, and your selfish heart, and run to Jesus, believing that he is all you need, you will be saved!

Read: Matthew 6:1-18 (NIV)

→ *Observe: Let's take a close look at what the text is saying.*

1. What does Jesus emphasize about when you practice righteousness (v. 1)?
2. What does a hypocrite do when giving to the needy (v. 2)? How is this different from what a follower of Jesus is supposed to do (v. 3-4)?
3. What does a hypocrite do when praying (v. 5)? How is this different from what a follower of Jesus is supposed to do (v. 6-8)?
4. What does a hypocrite do when fasting (v. 16) How is this different from what a follower of Jesus is supposed to do (v. 17-18)?
5. In summary - who are the hypocrites doing things for (v. 2, 5, 16)? Who are followers of Jesus doing things for (v. 4, 6, 18)? What do you notice about the difference in the rewards that they receive?
6. Does Jesus expect his followers to forgive other people? How do we know (v. 12, 14-15)?

→ *Interpret: Let's seek to understand the meaning of this text in its original context.*

1. Are these acts of righteousness - giving (v. 2), praying (v. 5), and fasting (v. 16) - optional for a follower of Jesus? How does the text help us answer that?

Let's split into 3 groups to look more closely at these examples of righteousness that Jesus gave. How does the text reveal what motivates a hypocrite in your example? What motivates true followers of Jesus? How would you contrast the two - what is the main difference?

2. Let's look more closely at prayer. What is prayer and what is its purpose?

Is there a right or wrong way to pray? Why or why not? What matters most when praying? How does the structure of the Lord's prayer reflect the priorities of God's Kingdom? *Do you struggle with prayer? How does this passage help you think about your own prayer life?*

3. Let's look more closely at fasting. What is fasting and what is its purpose? Why would Jesus say "when you fast" (v. 16) - how does fasting help someone's faith?

→ *Apply: Let's explore where the text intersects with our lives and our world.*

1. What are some current day examples of how people practice righteousness to be seen by others? *The ancient Greek word for hypocrite means "an actor"* - are there areas in your life where you are 'playing a part' when it comes to following Jesus? How does this text help reveal areas of hypocrisy in your own life?
2. A big place of hypocrisy in many Christians lives is not forgiving others. As we've talked about many weeks - if we say we love God, but don't forgive those around us, what does that really reveal? How do verses 14 and 15 help us wrestle with that? Who do you need to forgive?
3. Where might God be calling you to fast in your life? Another way to think about it - what things in your life are distracting you from living more purposefully? If you're thinking about participating in Lent, what fast for the next 40 days would help you draw closer to God?