



## SERMON - Wednesday 18th June '24 - How to live the Kingdom

We all like to receive a reward, don't we! Our Banks, some of them, know this, and so they give us a 'reward' when we spend money through them in certain ways. Mine gives me money back when I pay regular bills but direct debit, for example. And one of the big supermarkets at least offers 'Rewards' on certain items or classes of purchases we make with them. They are playing with our natural 'feel-good factor' whenever we receive a reward as a consequence of something that we have done. An Earned Reward somehow gives us a pleasant feeling inside.

And the odd thing is that we know in our heart of hearts that these companies are not really 'giving' us anything, but are using these rewards and our reaction to them to try to encourage us to behave in certain ways that ultimately benefit them, not us, and yet we still play their game and become 'Loyal Customers' They manage to convince us that we are the ones in control, but they are playing on our own natural gullibility really, our own natural behaviour in response to a real or perceived Reward, and we act as if we are the real winners!

Jesus, in our Gospel reading today from Matthew chapter 6, is actually talking about exactly the same sort of response amongst his listeners, or at least, amongst a certain group of His listeners. Jesus first warns all of His listeners to beware of seeking empty rewards by doing 'good works' at times and in places where & when they know that their peers will see them and give their approval.

But Jesus, as always, does not dwell upon this negative instruction, but moves on to three or four positive examples of how to and how not to do those 'good works'

And with each example, and in a way that our English translation does not pick on, Jesus opens with a general 'Do not...' clause. 'So whenever you give alms, do not...' that 'You' is in the plural - 'all of you' being the sort of idea.

Then, when Jesus then goes on to tell His listeners how they should behave when doing those 'Good Works' He says - 'but when you do give alms...' He uses the singular, and it is as if Jesus is then looking directly at an individual - 'me, or you in particular.

'Don't behave like 'Them', Jesus says, 'but you do things how I tell you to do them...'

But who are those 'Them'? 'They' are described by Jesus as being 'Hypocrites' which is a really interesting word in this context because it comes from the Greek that means 'Actors' These 'Them' are playing a game - acting out a performance with one agenda, and that agenda is not the helping of those in need.

And Jesu's teaching - His Lesson for the Day - goes on to repeat this formula in relationship to prayer in public, the language and content of true prayer, how true forgiveness is to imparted and finally the nature and practice of real fasting with purpose.

Now I know that some of this was not in our reading today, but I think they do all go together. Jesus is describing to His listeners an alternative way of going about their lives driven, not by seeking the approval of those around you, but by the will of the Father. Giving, Prayer, Forgiving, Fasting are all key activities of a member of the Kingdom of God. They are characteristics of the members - the Citizens - of the followers of Christ and are to bring Glory to God the Father. And, before God, you cannot simply play-act this lifestyle! We are not called so much to show what the Kingdom looks like as to Live the Kingdom of God and make it real!

The Play-actors / Hypocrites ensure they have an audience! If there is no audience around then they drum one up, by having trumpets announce what they are about to do, and then they speak with carefully choreographed and eloquent language to ensure it is memorable to those listening, and they go away basking in the glow of their audience, and that is their reward - all of it! But by tomorrow it is gone!

But when we follow Jesu's instructions then we truly imitate Jesus in His life of obedience to His Father's will. Jesus never sought to draw attention to himself, but always told those who heard Him and saw what He did that He was doing His Father's Will. And it was in Jesu's work at Calvary, which we remember at this Table, that He shows this most clearly. The confirmation of this is seen in that it was God who raised Him up on the third day, and we do read that Jesus endured all this '... for the joy that was set before Him!' - And do you realise that that 'Joy' is you and me and all who receive His death for our salvation!

Some translations of this passage end each section with the words - 'your Father, who sees (what you do) in secret, will reward you openly!' The Resurrection is God's very public 'Reward' for His Son and opens up the way for us to see God's approval of the work of His Son and it is as we truly see that work and take it as for us that we are saved! **AMEN**