

Audience of One

Matthew 6.1-4

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If you have followed the sermon series of the last seven weeks, on the sermon on the mountain, you have heard us speak about the substance of the news on tv and the main topics of soap operas.

All the dross of human existence was treated by Jesus in his one long sermon. He spoke of anger, contempt, hatred, obsessive lust, divorce, revenge, slapping, cursing, begging.

When Jesus spoke to his followers about the lifestyle of a Christian, he did not give a sermon about highly philosophical issues. He spoke very directly about their everyday life.



1. Let your light shine

Remember how Jesus began? He first said to all those who follow Him, the nice people, the silly people, the poor, the good and the bad, that they are blessed. Blessed because He is in their life.

When Jesus is part of your life, you belong to the kingdom of God. And that is amazing. He embraces you with love and forgiveness. You are blessed! If you belong to Him, you participate with Him in all the blessings that God gave to Jesus.

And immediately told his followers on that mountain, and us, that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Our Lord here challenges us. It is so nice and cosy to sit with Jesus on a hill, or here, be with Him in church, but in the end, we finish our service with 'go in peace to love and serve the Lord,' to enter into our mission field.

Jesus told his followers on that mountain the same thing. They could not stay in his warm embrace on that mountain, they had work to do.

'Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.'

Jesus told the rabble, the very common people gathered around Him, that God had a task for them. That is quite something to be told, because those common people were

always told by the religious leaders of Israel that they were useless for God. Because they did not follow all the laws that those religious leaders prescribed.

So immediately in his sermon Jesus warned the listeners: ‘the fact that the people of the law dismiss you as useless, but that I have called you blessed, does not mean that I put aside the law.’



Jesus then explains that He abides by the law, and He wants his followers to do the same, but, abide by the law as intended by God.

The laws of the Old Testament are great. They are God’s word. God’s direction for life. And what Jesus then did, was to peel off the onion of the many Pharisaic additions to Gods actual laws.

And He went to the heart of the matter.

If you only look at the externals of the laws God, and you forget about the intentions of the laws, you completely misunderstand what it means to love and to serve God.

The heart of all laws in the Bible, is that with our whole heart, we love God and we love the people He made. And with Jesus in our life, we change from the inside out; we get God’s spiritual energy; we experience God love; and our heart is gradually filled with love and kindness for all people.

That is what happens to followers of our Lord Jesus. They are slowly transformed. They are a light in this world, a light of God. Because with their love and generosity, they reflect the character of their heavenly Father and they are a blessing for the people around them.

2. But a warning...

Jesus tells his followers: ‘Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.’

But that seems to conflict with what He then said, with the words we have just read. “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”

So what is it, should people see how we live and act, or should we try to hide it?

That last approach - to keep your religion for yourself, is certainly much practiced in our days. There are many people and movements, and political parties that would want to see religion taken out of the public square altogether.

In the Muslim world I have met many secret Christians, who do their best to not show anyone that they believe in Jesus Christ. They have their reasons - to save their skin.

But for us in our free western world, there is no excuse for us. Something is wrong if people do not know that we are followers of Jesus. Being a follower of Jesus cannot be hidden, because it is not a mental cerebral issue only - it is a matter of the heart and of our actions.

Actions - Jesus ends his sermon on the mount with the star call. He tells the story of a man who build his house on sand, and it collapsed when storms and rain came. 'Anyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like that foolish man,' Jesus said.

Our Christian life is about doing. "Let your light shine so that people give glory to your Father."

So what does Jesus mean when He say that we must not practice our righteousness before other people?

The secret of course is the motivation. We should not act in order for people to see it. And Jesus gives an example. Many of the religious leaders of Israel made a big point of making sure that all other noticed how religious they were.

They announced their donations to the needy, they even trumpeted it in the squares, they made sure that at the prayer times they were in public places, so that all people could see them pray.

'Those people are so upright. God must be so glad with them. They are so committed. They pray so beautifully.'

This was a grave mistake of those Pharisees, completely contrary to what God wants from us.

But, we must not hide our acts of service and our worship for God. They can be seen by anyone. How can you hide what is your most precious thing in life - your Lord Jesus Christ and obeying Him.

Hiding your Christian lifestyle is not good. We are supposed to be a light for our world; that glorifies God.

And you know what happens when you try to hide a candle from being seen, if you put something over it. Take away the oxygen and the flame dies.

But to be a showoff is also wrong. Because God hides from you, if your interest is to get the honour from other people. God does not need to be involved if you arrange praise for yourself.



The difference is subtle of course. And the difference is the heart of the matter. And a matter of the heart. What are you focused on: serving God or being seen by people?

3. An audience of One

In fact, Jesus points at the same issue that was central in his explanation of the law and how to live. Central is the attitude of our heart.

Our lifestyle and our whole life is to be centred on God. Or rather, He surrounds us. He fills our heart and our mind.

It is as if in our life, we perform in a theatre, with an audience of only one.

Sure, the theatre of life is filled with your friends, your neighbours, your colleagues, family, people you accidentally meet... They fill the theater of your life.

But in the front row is God. And when you perform, it is as if you do it for him only. And if you do it well, God cheers you on. And you hardly notice that the whole theater stands in awe. Because you care for God's opinion only.

Paul writes to Christians in Colossae to do their work well, to live well. And how can they do that?

Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive your inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ. (Col 3.23-24)

Jesus comes back to this issue of not showing off, not giving donation to the needy in order to be seen. He says:

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

That is truly interesting. Jesus suggests that in your giving, or any act for God, you should not even be aware of what you are doing.

If I tell you now, that you must not - I say you must NOT - think of a chicken, you must not envision a chicken, then you probably already saw five chicken run around in your mind.

If I tell you that you must not let your left hand know the money that your other hand puts in the offering, you have a problem.

Jesus is telling us, I think, that in our acts of charity, and in all of our life for God, we should to a certain extent, not be self-aware at all. It has to come naturally, because you are a child of God, and you reflect God's ethos.



Even for you, it is almost a secret what you are giving to help others, how you serve God. Loving Him and serving Him is your nature, or it is in the process of becoming your nature, to the extent that you allow Jesus to fill your heart and your mind.

Conclusion

That is the impact of Him in our lives. We are blessed. We belong to His Kingdom. He fills our hearts with a desire to love and obey Him.

We cannot help it but we are moved by Him all the time to also love and serve other people.

You can impact your circumstances and the people around you, you can be a light, not by focussing too much on those circumstances, and not by trying hard.

But mostly by looking at the audience of One who cheers you on from the front row of your life.

Amen.