

The Ethics of Jesus Kingdom Part 2: A Greater Focus

The Internet is such a great place to hide - to pretend to be more than we are. Facebook is bad enough, but dating sites like OkCupid and Match.com are some of the best places to fashion our own avatars. An avatar is the alter ego we want others to see and to know us by. Religion can be another place to hide and develop spiritual avatars by doing religious practices for show - things like public prayer, living by our titles and referring to the good things we have done at just the right moment. This was what Jesus hated most about the Pharisees who were considered by many to be the most committed of all the religious groups in his day. The Pharisees were a lay movement that rigidly practiced Jewish law. They even followed rules surrounding the law to protect it and keep them from breaking it. This is how they appeared to be so devoted. But it's also why they came into such conflict with Jesus – because Jesus saw right through their pretense. They practiced their right living before men instead of God. When religious practice, in spite of our poverty of spirit, bubbles up from God's blessing we are living from the new self being formed by God instead of our self-made avatars fashioned for the attention and praise of men. This is the spirituality of the kingdom – spirituality from the inside out!

Journey Together:

- 1). What are some of the most ridiculous lies you have seen on the Internet?
- 2). What are some pretentious things you have said or done on the Internet?
- 3). What are some pretentious things you have seen or done at church?

Road Map: Matthew 6

- 4). Matthew 6 is about “practicing our righteousness to be seen by others”. What does this look like? When and where have you seen this? Have you ever been tempted to pretend that you are more spiritual than you really are? Why are we tempted to do this?
- 5). Jesus says to practice our faith in secret. What does he mean by a “secret” faith? Why does He instruct us to pray, give and make promises in secret? What relationship do these practices

have with the beatitudes and the “better” righteousness of Matthew 5?

- 6). In what way is giving to others a spiritual discipline? How have you been blessed by giving something away?
- 7). What do you find most rewarding, difficult, frustrating or easy about prayer? How does the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples help you in your own communion with God?
- 8). What does Jesus mean by “storing up our treasures in heaven?” How is this a spiritual discipline? How is our relationship with earthly goods an insight into our soul and what relationship does this have with the beatitudes of Matthew 5 and the “better righteousness of the kingdom”?
- 9). What does Jesus mean by seeking first the kingdom? What is the relationship between the spiritual practices of Matthew 6 and “seeking first the kingdom?”

Discipleship challenge: Jesus is challenging us in our spiritual practices. Focus this week on your prayer life, the help you give to others and the value you place on material things. How can you tell if these practices are for God or to be seen by others?

- 10). How can this group pray for you right now?

My Journey:

- 1). How has God been using journey in your life this week to do *Great Things* for Him?
- 2). How has God been guiding in the practices of your heart this week?
- 3). How can this group pray for you today?

Backstory:

The 2014 film *Big Eyes* is about the life of American artist Margret Keane - famous for drawing portraits and paintings with big eyes. It follows the story of Margaret and her husband, Walter Keane, who took credit for Margaret's phenomenally successful and popular paintings in the 1950s and 1960s. His name was on all her works since it was inconceivable in those days for a woman to be so accomplished.

How do you feel when someone takes credit for something you did? This is the focus of Matthew 6. Since life in the kingdom is a gift-life from God, then we have no right to parade what appears as our spiritual accomplishments before others as if we achieved them on our own. The audience of kingdom life is not ourselves or others, but God. It is the life in “secret” – the hidden righteousness of God for us and in us, reflecting only to Him. If righteousness is something we’ve earned by our own generosity, spiritual devotion, discipline and self-denial, then we have a lot to boast about, but not before God.

The goal of this week’s study and discussion is to emphasize this new Godward focus of life. We are now living a life of gratitude toward God in place of striving to please others. When life is received as a gift from God, giving to others becomes a true heartfelt desire to bless others as we have been so richly blessed. Prayer becomes a private conversation with God instead of a parade of personal piety. Fasting becomes a hunger for something more than material food, pleasure or success. It is a longing for more and more of the life of God in contrast to the things of this world for “man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” As impressive as the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees appears on the outside, Matthew 6 is a reminder of the spiritual impoverishment of human righteousness in comparison with the righteousness of God.

In view of the Sermon on the Mount, we really can’t speak of righteousness and mean anything other than the righteousness of

God. There is no other “righteousness” than God’s righteousness. God is the standard and definition of righteousness. Anything less than Him is not righteousness at all. We can speak of our attempts to be righteous, but the righteousness of God is the only true righteousness. Righteousness outside of or apart from God is no righteousness at all.

In Matthew 6, Jesus calls us to a renewed life where we indulge in the gift of God’s righteousness – seeking first the kingdom instead of erecting our own. Jesus wants us to engage fully with His life from above. He calls us to reject fake righteousness – the making of our own fig leaves in place of the robe of the life of God in Christ. He wants us to live in dependence on God as the birds of the air and the flowers of the field who look completely to Him in comparison to the striving fruitless effort of Adam after the fall that yielded only thorns and thistles.

The inner righteousness of the kingdom is a return to the full, joy filled life of the garden before sin cut us off from God. Life in the kingdom is not only a gift from God, it is a life focused toward God. We are no longer living for human praise. We have the approval of God and we live for His presence, His praise and for His glory. We are no longer worried about tomorrow, because we have been given today. We can now finally seek the kingdom first in our life because it’s ours for the taking! Jesus has brought God’s kingdom within our reach for the kingdom of God is at hand! *“Fear not little flock, it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom!”* Luke 12:32