

# FOR GOD'S EYES ONLY

## Matthew 6v1-21

Last week I launched a short series on 'Your Inner World' by looking at Matthew 26v41: "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." We saw three things:

- Jesus distinguishes between our flesh and spirit. We live in a material world, but we also have an inner world.
- Our physical make-up is in daily tension with our desire to develop our inner world. "The flesh is weak"
- Nevertheless, our spirit is willing; it is predisposed to pray; it has desire for God.

Today we turn back the pages back to **Matthew 6v1-21**. The key word in this extract from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is the Greek 'kruptos', translated as 'secret'; **Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (v4, 6, 18)** It is from this word 'kruptos' that we derive our English word "crypt" i.e. a vault or cellar – a place that is hidden, concealed and covered. This is about your secret life; your inner world.

The Sunday papers love to take the lid off people's secret lives, especially celebrities - shock revelations of shameful secrets which result in the celebrity being humiliated and disgraced. Yet our passage this morning is about a secret life over which you need not be ashamed.

God can see every hidden thing in your life. Nothing escapes His attention. But we need to realize this: When God looks beneath the surface of your life He is looking for good things not bad. He is not snooping around to find fault. In the Bible this is what Satan does, not God. Check out the book of Job! Unfortunately this is some people's view of God. No! He is actively looking for good things in you, not bad. When He finds unrighteousness in you He is surprised because He expects to find goodness now that you are in Christ!

### 1. Living for public applause.

First Jesus describes the kind of photo-opportunity mentality which we can all slip into and which the Pharisees were well known for. i.e. making sure your good deeds are seen. He gives three examples:

In verse 2 it is in connection with **giving**. *"When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full."* In the Jerusalem Temple there were thirteen brass receptacles for gifts. If you threw your money in with a flourish it made a loud noise. This came to be known as "sounding a trumpet".

In verse 5 it is about **praying**. *"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward*

*in full.*” Many of the religious men of the day made sure their devotions were very visible.

In verse 16 it is about **fasting**. :*“When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”* This calls to mind an old Lonnie Donegan song from my boyhood with the line, “Putting on the agony, putting on the style.”

Each time such people are called *“hypocrites”*. This is the language of the theatre. A *‘hypocrites’* was a mask worn by an actor or orator i.e. somebody pretending to be someone else. Their actions were designed to get applause. They have already had their reward. They wanted people to admire them and they’ve succeeded.

Instead, Jesus says, your acts of righteousness are to be for God. Rather than making sure everyone knows how generous you are, or spiritual, or self-disciplined – give more attention to your life beneath surface level.

## **2. Living for God’s eyes**

**Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.** God sees what is done in secret.

This is saying something one step on from Psalm 139 the great Scripture about God’s Omniscience. *“O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.”* (Psalm 139v1-4)

Here we learn that God takes special Fatherly interest in your secret life, and especially those things that area for His eyes only. When your aim is to bring delight to Him, you have His full attention!

### **Your giving**

verses 3,4: *“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”* Yes, there is a place for public giving, like the BBC’s annual Children in Need’ appeal. There are also occasions when it is good to give a gift to another person face to face, because it can deepen your relationship. But here Jesus highlights the importance of anonymous giving. It might equally apply to your regular giving – when only you and God know what sacrifice and faith this represents.

This is generosity that cannot possibly attract praise from other people. You can gain no advantage over someone else. You don’t put anyone in your favour. You are safe from mixed motives. It is the very opposite of parading a cheque to a charity for the camera. This is for God’s eyes. It is for His

pleasure. See Luke 21v1,2 where Jesus took such pleasure in a poor widow's gift.

## Your praying

verse 6. *"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."* (I will come back to this verse next week.) Yes, we can pray in groups and in pairs. Yes, it is important to have people pray out on Sunday mornings. But here Jesus talks of secret prayer. Liz still recalls the day, as a small girl, that she burst into her dad's room to find him on his knees. This is prayer that is for God's eyes and ears only. It is just between the two of you.

Of course, what happens is that your private prayer life overflows into the public arena, not in showing off, but in other ways. Let me give you an example from the biography of the great missionary to China, Hudson Taylor. This was written by someone who heard him pray in public around 1872.

*"Mr Taylor opened the meeting by giving out a hymn and seating himself at the harmonium led the singing. His appearance did not impress me. He was slightly built, and spoke in a gentle voice. Like most young men, I suppose I associated power with noise, and looked for great physical presence in a leader. But when he said, "Let us pray", and proceeded to lead the meeting in prayer, my ideas underwent a change. I had never heard anyone pray like that. There was a simplicity, a tenderness, a boldness, a power that hushed and subdued one, and made it clear that God Himself had admitted him into the inner circle of His friendship. He spoke with God face to face as man talks with his friend. Such praying was evidently the outcome of long tarrying in the secret place..."* ('Dr. & Mrs. Howard Taylor: 'Hudson Taylor' Vol. 2. 'The Growth of a Work of God')

## Your fasting

verses 17,18: *"But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."* It may be going with meals as a token of hungering after God. It may be switching off the telly or X Box to say to Him that your eyes are on Him. But whatever it might be, you don't shout about it. It is for God.

In Arthur Wallis' book 'God's Chosen Fast' he points out that many people say "Fasting today! Whatever is to be gained by that?" In other words "What do I get out of it?" *"When Joel cried 'Sanctify a fast', he meant, 'Set it apart for God'. This is absolutely basic if our fasting is to be acceptable to him. Then there will be times when we shall forget the matter of our personal gain, when we shall be caught up in wonder, love and praise, as we fast to God. We shall find ourselves like Anna the prophetess worshipping with fasting (Luke 2v37).. This is surely the loftiest conception, that it is worshipping or ministering to the*

*Lord, a giving of ourselves to God, and only secondarily a means to secure certain spiritual ends.*" (Wallis: 'God's Chosen Fast' Victory Press. 1968)

Giving, praying and fasting! When God takes the lid off this kind of secret life, He finds a place that is clean and fragrant and attractive. He discovers a warm and welcoming room furnished with good things. i.e. a life of righteousness that has been lived in secret, and stored up for God's eyes only. This is not just the absence of sin; this a secret life full of valuable treasure.

Let me ask you two questions as I close this morning

### 1. Is there more to you than meets the eye?

G.K. Chesterton described another famous author's writings as "*a vast ocean two inches deep*". He thought his books were shallow. Well, what about you and me as people? Are we two inches deep? Are we shallow? Or is there some depth to our lives? Like the wise man who built his house on the rock of Jesus – he "*dug down deep*". (Luke 6v48) So is there more to you than meets the eye?

- Secret victories in personal battles with temptation.
- Quiet, unannounced deeds of kindness.
- Serving behind the scenes without wanting any thanks.
- Giving yourself to someone in need, not just for a few hours but, for months and even years- without any desire for payment.
- Allowing others to take the credit due to you.

This is the opposite of a photo-opportunity mentality which says, "If the camera wasn't there it was all a waste!" No. This was for God! For His eyes only.

### 2. Are you building up treasure in your secret place?

It is a mistake to separate this teaching from **verses 19-21:** "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*"

Some people spend their lives storing up an impressive public reputation, only to have it swept away in a moment, but we have been talking about treasure than can never be lost. Every quiet act of generosity, every secret time of prayer, every fast as an expression of worship is treasure. It is furnishing your secret place. These are the things that will never be burned up. They will not be left behind when you die. You will take them with you and they will be part of your reward – your inheritance in heaven.

**John Wilthew. January 2008.**