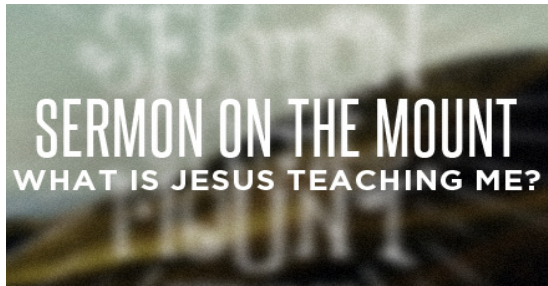


Lessons for Life



Week 5

These weekly studies are loosely based on the previous Sunday's sermon. If you missed it, you will find a recording on our website (www.knaphillbaptist.org.uk). They are designed for both Home Group discussion and/or personal reflection. Don't necessarily try to cover all the questions and discussion topics in your group at one sitting. You may like to think about them later in your own time.



Read Matthew 6:1-18

This is the fifth in our series of studies based on the Sermon on the Mount, (Matthew 5-7) entitled *Lessons for Life*. These chapters contain various sayings of Jesus that together form a coherent body of teaching, that are, considered to be, the blue-print for the Christian lifestyle. If we are to be true and authentic followers of Jesus we need to model our lives on what Jesus says here and allow it to shape, inform and define our identity. In these verses Jesus clearly advocates the spiritual disciplines of giving, praying and fasting. But it is not enough just to do these things, the manner in which we do them is perhaps even more important. Jesus speaks here about our attitudes, intentions and motivations. His call to us is to **OPENNESS AND AUTHENTICITY**.

Questions and pointers for discussion/reflection

1. Have you ever felt like a fraud, a 'play-actor' (literal meaning of 'hypocrite')? After all God knows what really goes on in our hearts and minds! Just to say at this point that **every single** Christian feels like this. As John Newton used to say, '*I am not what I could be, I am not what I should be, I am not what I ought to be, but thank God I am not what I used to be.*' Be encouraged! Anything else would smack of spiritual pride – see 1 Corinthians 8:1,2 and Romans 12:3. Also Ephesians 3:7,8, Galatians 2:9, Romans 15:5.
2. What are the 'acts of righteousness' (v.1) that Jesus outlines here? What is the general principle Jesus states in these verses?
3. Almsgiving, prayer and fasting were obligations for Jews, as they are also for Muslims. Is Jesus suggesting that they should not be obligations for Christians? If not, what is his point? If people don't know we are being pious, what might be the temptation for us?
4. What does not 'letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing' mean? How should we apply it to our giving? See 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 and Mark 12:41-44. Do these passages contradict Jesus' message about secret giving?
5. The Jews took prayer very seriously, regarding it as even more important than good works. Do we? They prayed at least at 9.00 am, 12 noon and 3.00 pm. What do you think would be the equivalent for us to pray like the hypocrites (v.5). Should we ever pray like this? Is Jesus saying that private prayer is more important than public prayer? If so, in what way?
6. Read the Lord's prayer together. Discuss its place in public and private prayer. What speaks to you most from this prayer?
7. Why does Jesus introduce the place of forgiveness at this point (vs.14-16)? In what way does our unforgiveness preclude God's forgiveness? Have you ever found it difficult to forgive? Is there someone you need to forgive now? Read Matthew 18:23-25 and compare with Matthew 10:8 and Colossians 3:12-14.
8. Have you ever fasted? Is it just about abstaining from food? The message translates fasting in verse 16 as an '*appetite denying discipline to better concentrate on God*'. In what other ways can we fast and what is the point of it? See Leviticus 23:27.

Jesus reminds us that nothing is actually done in secret because God sees and knows all (vs 4,6,18). Read and reflect on Psalm 34:15, 139:1-10; Proverbs 24:12; Luke 12:7; Hebrews 4:12,13.