

# WHY JESUS HATES HEARTLESS RELIGION

## MATTHEW 6V1T018

There's a theme that runs through this section of the Sermon on the Mount - and again, it's all about what it means for Israel to turn back to God with "all their heart and soul." They might be going through the motions of their religion - they might even be doing "good things." But if they're doing it for the wrong reasons, their reward will be not quite what they expect. Acts of "religion" are fertile ground for wrong attitudes. It's very easy to do good things for bad reasons - even good religious things like praying, giving and fasting.

**Read through Matthew 6:1-18, watching out for repeating words and ideas.**

1. Which verse do you think best summarises the whole section?
2. Have you ever noticed people who give, pray, or perform other religious acts so as to be noticed by men? Have you ever done this yourself?
3. What word does Jesus use to describe people like this? (See v2, v5 and v16.)

*Hypocrisy* was the great failing of the Pharisees. What about Christians?

### 4. "I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full..."

Jesus uses exactly these same words three times.

What are the verse references?

What reward do they receive?

What reward do they miss out on?

Which would YOU rather?

5. Is Jesus against giving? What safeguards can we use to make sure *we* have the right balance here?

6. How should *we* pray? What pitfalls should we avoid?



7. Consider the model prayer Jesus demonstrates in verses 9 to 13.

What principles can you draw from it that we should include in our own prayers?

How do you think the prayer fits with the yearnings of Israel waiting for God's kingdom to be restored?

How does the Lord's Prayer describe “the Kingdom”?

8. How does the second part of verse 10 explain the first part of verse 10?

#### FOOD FOR THOUGHT...

*To what extent do you think we see the prayer fulfilled in Matthew's gospel? John the Baptist and Jesus both said “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.” Do we in some way see God's Kingdom “arrive”? When, and how?*

9. According to verses 14-15, what sort of “heart attitude” typifies Israel? How does this impede God's “blessing” of Israel again, according to what we've seen of Deuteronomy 30:1-6? (Surely you didn't think we'd get through a study without it?)

Compare verse 12 with with 5:7, and 5:23 and 24. Why is God so interested in the “hearts” of these people?

10. The Israelites were meant to fast ritually once a year; it was also common to fast as a sign of grief or repentance. The Pharisees had turned fasting into something else entirely. What did they do, and why?

12. In what ways are you tempted to do GOOD THINGS for BAD REASONS?

How can we safeguard against this?

Who are you when no-one is looking? Are you generous? Are you prayerful? Are you merciful and forgiving? Or are you only like this when the spotlight is on you?

In the light of this study, what attitudes do you need to change?

Does thinking through these things make you “*hungry and thirsty for righteousness*”? (In the context in Matthew 6, I wonder if hearing Jesus make the Israelites hungry and thirsty for righteousness? We'll have to read the rest of the story to find out!)

