

Matthew 6v1-4 and 19-24

There was a footballer playing in the FA Cup final yesterday, by the name of Djibril Cisse. Now he's a guy who seems to be keen on drawing attention to himself. He shaves crazy patterns into his hairstyle, and dyes his facial hair platinum blonde.

Yesterday, for some reason, he decided to wear one red football boot, and one white one.

Then at half time, presumably not thinking it was sensible to listen to the manager's half time team talk, he changed from those football boots, not into some which were the same colour, but into two bright yellow boots.

I think it's because he's realised that he's unable to impress anyone with his football skills, so he has to find another way of doing it.

We all know people, don't we, who love to be centre stage. Who when they walk into a room, just have to do or say, or wear, something that grabs everyone's attention. I guess we all might do that sometimes.

But perhaps you're not like that. Perhaps you get really angry and annoyed with people like Djibril Cisse, they really get up your nose, and you are totally the opposite. You actually prefer it if people don't notice you at all, and so you make a point of having a normal hairstyle and only ever wearing navy blue clothes.

Well this first section of today's passage is particularly aimed at people who like to draw attention to themselves. Who like other people to notice them.

But if you're someone who doesn't think they are anything like Djibril Cisse, you're **not** allowed to switch off.

Because every single one of us **is** at risk of playing to the crowd. It is the way we, as humans, are wired.

It might not be in outrageous ways, it might be in very small ways. But for example, don't we all secretly love it when someone notices that we've been particularly good recently. When you've done that little bit more than your fair share of washing up in the house.

How many of us try to find a way to casually drop it into the conversation? Or, if we manage to restrain ourselves from doing that, we really are desperate for them to notice anyway.

And if it's not the washing up, it's the time we went out of our way to give someone a lift, or the extra effort we made speaking to that person who no-one else seems to talk to.

Or the prayer that we prayed in the prayer meeting - but we didn't really pray it to God, we prayed it so that the people around us were impressed with us.

We are all desperate for an audience, some if not most of the time.

And that's what v 1-4 of this passage are all about - playing to an audience.

And so our first point is ...

2 Audiences

In chapter 5 of Matthew, Jesus has been teaching us that to

be part of his kingdom, we need to match up to his high moral standards. We need to be righteous. Really really righteous. Perfect, in fact, v48.

And it's with that command to be perfect ringing in our ears, that Jesus says in 6v1 "be careful!". Beware!

Those first two words are particularly important, because it suggests that we might not be careful. We might be complacent! So if you're still thinking that this really isn't aimed at you because you're not like Djibril Cisse, and you're not really listening, well, listen again, "be careful!", Jesus is saying, "it's easy to fall into this trap".

"Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them."

You see, when we hear things like "be righteous, be perfect", the danger is that we will scurry off and do our best to be righteous and perfect, **but also** make sure that other people know about it.

Hoping that the people around us give us a generous round of applause. Which they often will do.

And when it comes to money and giving, which we're thinking about particularly this morning, we are especially tempted to do this kind of thing.

Which is why Jesus starts talking about money in v2 - READ.

You see, it would be easy for us, after this gift Sunday, to be challenged about how we are using our money, and go away with all sorts of good intentions. And even to wholeheartedly put them all into practice.

To give more to the poor, to the persecuted, or to the church, to stop spending our money on daft things that we shouldn't do.

To go away and be the most generous and wise stewards of our money - and yet to be doing it all **in the hope that other people will notice**.

But OK, you might ask? Isn't it better that we give money, even if our motives are rubbish?

Well, for the people receiving it, yes it is, but it's a very dangerous thing **for you** to do. Look at the second half of v1 - READ.

You won't get any reward from God for **that**. He won't be pleased with you for **that**.

You will **get** a reward. Look at v2b - you'll receive your reward in full. You'll get exactly what you were after. Your mates who see your changed lifestyle will think you've been ever so spiritual. The church treasurer will be impressed and really grateful for your generosity. **That** audience will give you a hearty round of applause.

But that's the only applause you will get. Don't expect God to be impressed.

Jesus says that people like this are hypocrites. The idea of hypocrite comes from the idea of actors, on a stage, wearing masks. It's people who pretend to be one thing, wearing a mask, and who do it all for an audience.

So, what's the solution to avoiding this trap of playing to an

audience? How **can** we please God in the way we give?

The answer is to stop playing to an audience at all.

The way to avoid being a hypocrite is to remember v1 and "be careful!" To be careful verse 3, that not even your left hand knows when your right hand is giving. To do these things in secret, verse 4.

Except, as verse 4 says, there is always an audience, even to the things done in secret. It's God.

He doesn't join in the round of applause that everyone else gives in v2. He's not fooled by the masks we put on. But he does love to reward us when we give generously, in secret.

So, whatever way we choose in all this, we will get recognition for it. We will get rewarded one way or another.

But we'll only get recognition from one audience. We are only going to get one round of applause. We're not going to be able to impress men, and God, at the same time.

So which audience are we going to play to? Whose round of applause do we want?

Well we get another reason to make sure we are doing things in front of the right audience in verses 19-21.

And I'm calling this section

2 Investments, v19-21

v 19-20 - READ.

What are the treasures Jesus is talking about? Well, I think he has two things in mind. Yes, he's thinking about money and resources and whether our use of money is for this world or the next. But I also think he's carrying on this theme of recognition and praise. We can invest in this earth and look to get praise from people, or we can invest in heaven and look to please God.

And just as we have a choice of 2 audiences, we have a choice of 2 investments as well.

On the one hand, we can choose to invest in this earth. Or on the other hand, we can choose to invest in heaven.

How are we going to choose between the two?

Well, I don't know if you've ever had to buy a financial product, but it can be incredibly confusing. You've got this account which pays so much interest, but you're only allowed one withdrawal per year, or you've got this one which pays a great rate but only if your balance is above £1000.

You can choose a bog standard fixed rate mortgage, or an all-singing all-dancing flexible-offset-discounted-tracker mortgage.

You can choose a standard current account, or pay an annual fee and get the platinum account which gives you a bigger overdraft and some free premium bonds. And a prettier card.

It can be desperately confusing and difficult to decide between all the different options these days. It can take us ages to decide which one to go for!

But, happily, there are only two choices in this passage, and it's shouldn't really take us very long to work out which is the better investment, should it?

Put your money into the earthly bank account, and you're not going to get any interest on it. In fact, it's going to depreciate in value.

The moths and rust will eat away at it, and thieves are going to break into the bank vault and steal half the money as well.

But put your investment into the heavenly bank account, and it's 100% secure. Thieves are never going to get in there.

The mothballs in heaven are extra-double-super strength and they're never going to run out of them.

There are 2 investments, but only one of them holds its value.

This really is a no-brainer, isn't it? Isn't it?

It is, we all know that.

But I wonder if you've spotted the problem with all of this.

On paper, it's obvious which audience we should play to, and which investment we should choose.

The problem is that in the day to day of life and work and study and family and girlfriends and boyfriends and stress and tiredness, we find this very easy to forget. And very difficult to believe.

Because when people praise us, we feel great, don't we? It's tangible and we can hear them say it and feel their pats on the back. And earthly possessions, well they're tangible, we can taste our luxury food and pat our fat wallets and enjoy

our luxury cars and satellite TV.

With God's rewards, and with heavenly treasures, well, they're not tangible, are they?

We don't get them all straight away, and we can't touch and taste and feel them. It does, frankly, sometimes seem easier to do things in the hope that people will pat us on the back, because frankly sometimes we just feel like we need that encouragement and that reading some words in an ancient book just isn't what we're looking for.

I'm sure we all feel like that sometimes.

But all we can do is trust God, trust his word, when he says these things to us.

When he says that it is more blessed to give, than to receive.

When he says that the praises of men will not last forever.

The rewards we get from other people's praises will get moth eaten and rusty. The applause from **that** audience will die down. Our cars will rust and our decor will get outdated and our I-pods will be replaced by some other gadget.

But God's rewards will never end, and his applause will never die down. His fatherly care and love for us will never diminish.

Well, if we need any more encouragement to make the right investment choice, look at v21 - READ.

The simple challenge is, "do we believe God when he tells us this?" Do we believe it?

Are we going to live by sight and invest in this world. Or will we battle to live by faith and invest in the things that last.

Invest our time and money in gospel ministry, in our relationship with God and in the next world.

So,
2 audiences, but only one round of applause.
2 investments, but only one holds its value.

and finally,

2 Masters, v22-24

Well, I'm afraid that in this section, things don't get any easier.

You see, with our first two points, you might be tempted to think that it's the kind of thing where we have our good days and bad days, but as long as our good days generally outweigh our bad days, then things will be ok.

So, sometimes we might aim to please people, rather than God, but as long as **most** of the time we're trying to please God, we think we'll be ok.

And while we might **sometimes** store things up for ourselves on earth, as long as on balance we're storing up more stuff in heaven, we'll be ok.

But this last section won't let us take that attitude.

v22-23 seem a little out of place at first, but they actually fit into the flow of the passage quite nicely.

The point in these verses is that the health of the body depends on the eye. And if the eye is "good", the body will be healthy and full of light.

Now "good" here is a word which can also mean devoted, and single minded. Focussed.

So if the eye is devoted and single minded, the body will be healthy. It will know where it is going, it will be a reliable guide to the body.

If the eye is bad, if it isn't single minded, it's as if it has double vision. It's not going to serve any useful purpose at all.

And the context of the surrounding verses suggests that the devotedness, the single minded-ness, is talking about being devoted to heaven, and more particularly to God himself.

That's what verse 24 says - READ.

We either serve God, or some other master. We can't serve 2 masters.
We can only serve 1.

It's utterly black and white, isn't it?
We will either be full of light, or full of darkness.
We either serve God, or something else.
There's no middle ground here.

If we love money or possessions we'll hate God because we know God demands that we hold loose to money and possessions, and we'll resent him for that. We'll resent the fact that our church has a gift day and asks us for money.

If we love God, on the other hand, we'll know the dangers of money and hate the way it tempts us and drags us away from him.

Take a stroll down into the city centre, and you'll come across

a brand spanking new shopping centre called the Met Quarter. I've never been in cos all the trendiness kind of intimidates me.

But have you seen the advertising slogan for the Met Quarter? "I want, I need, I have".

Some people will try and tell you that materialism is dead. "Materialism was for the 1980's, and we've moved on from that now."

I don't believe that for a second.

"I want, I need, I have". Materialism is alive and well. And we need to be very careful that we don't buy into it.

How will we know if we've bought into materialism and started serving money as our master instead of God?

Well, we'll examine ourselves, and our bank statements, and see whether we are obeying what God tells us to do, or what materialism tells us to do.

What does materialism tell us? "I want, I need, I have". It tells us that we will be satisfied when we have things, and it tells us that we have a right and a duty to ourselves to make sure we get the things we want. It tells us that if that means working overtime or getting a job which drags us away from church or family life, then so be it. It tells us that it's much better to live for tangible earthly treasures that we can experience right now, and it scoffs at the idea of waiting for treasures in heaven.

What does God tell us when it comes to money? He tells us that it is a dangerous thing, a source of temptation and pride that can lead us and others into sin.

He tells us to give generously and cheerfully, knowing that it is more blessed to give than to receive. He tells us that to deny ourselves and follow Christ is actually the best thing for us. He tells us to store up treasures in heaven, and live by faith, trusting that what he says is true.

So, we have to ask ourselves the simple question, are we singlemindedly serving God? Are our eyes healthy? Are we devoted to him? Do we **love** him?

Or are we going to chase after the things of this world, whether it be the praises of men, or material things.

Will we simply believe God's word here before us today, that treasures in heaven are infinitely better than treasures on earth, which will fade away and do us no good at all?

Will we trust God at his word when he promises to reward us, giving us good gifts, as a loving father generously gives his children good gifts?

Will we play to **his** audience, will we invest in the **right** place, and will we serve the **right** master?