

Stay in and get out

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[0 : 00] Ruth, thank you. Can I start by saying I haven't had a chance myself, how glad I am and thankful! to God for our first 10 years as a church. It's actually been a really lovely thing for me over! Well, a false start a month ago, but also this week, hunting down old photos and lots of emails to and fro with people who've moved on from Orchard Park. It's really stirred my memories, made me remember, made me feel all the ups of being part of this church over the past 10 years, and the downs as well, which you don't see so much in the photos, not least these past years of Covid, illness and lockdown and isolation which have taken a toll on so many of us. I am so profoundly grateful to God for seeing us through and for building a living church, and here we are today.

I'm also really thankful to God this autumn for the Sermon on the Mount, in and of itself wonderful teaching from Jesus, but also because looking forward to the next 10 years, wonderfully I don't feel I have to hunt around for something really profound to say, because Jesus has already spoken, and he's told us as a church how to do God's will and please our Father in heaven over these coming 10 years and beyond, right here in the readings we heard. We've read from the Sermon on the Mount, it's really early on in the public ministry of Jesus, and if you've been with us you'll remember what's happened. Fulfilling God's promises, Jesus comes into a dark world full of distress and violence and sin and gloom and death, and he comes like a dawning light, saying, repent for the kingdom of heaven is near. This is such good news for people living in darkness that God has come near to us, his son Jesus come to save us from our sins and restore us to God and rule us and bless us.

And that's why it's time to repent, to turn back to God, become a disciple of Jesus and join God's forgiven family and be blessed by God forever. In the Sermon on the Mount, really early on in the public ministry of Jesus, Jesus gathers his first disciples around him and he teaches them about the kingdom of heaven. He says, this is how it's meant to be for you living under God's saving rule. This is how to live in such a radical way, such a counter-cultural way, that you not only please your Father in heaven, but you also light up the world. When we first scheduled this 10-year service for earlier in September, I'd wanted to, I planned to speak from Matthew 5 about us being the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Don't blend in, don't hide away, we're meant to get out there and do good deeds in the world. But now, four weeks later, unplanned, we arrived in chapter 6.

Whereas the salt in the earth passage is, salt of the earth passage is all about being disciples in public, letting your light shine before others. Strikingly, this chapter 6 reading is all about being disciples in private, hidden away, where you can't be seen by others.

And if we're asking this morning, how can this church over the coming years, how can we do God's will and please our Father in heaven and make a difference in our community we're a part of?

[3 : 50] Maybe, actually undoubtedly, chapter 6 and chapter 5 together have something really important to say to us. So, two things this morning for us to consider from the Sermon on the Mount.

Straight teaching from the lips of Jesus to shape us as a church for the next 10 years. Here's the first thing from Matthew 6, verses 5 to 15. As a church, we are meant to stay in and pray.

We're meant to stay in and pray, secretly and straightforwardly. In chapter 6, verses 1 to 18, Jesus has in his sight the kind of phony religion, the kind of phony churches that are all shown and showing off.

And he starts off in 6, verse 1, look, Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. Because if you do, you'll have no reward from your Father in heaven.

So don't do your religion so that other people will look at you and think how good you are. Like when you give money, verse 2. So 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 others.

[5 : 15] It means, as a church, we should give food and money to the Red Hen Project to help local families in need. And we should gather gifts so that at Cambridge Regional College, they can give

Christmas treat bags to look after children.

But don't announce it with trumpets. Don't put a St John's t-shirt on and get a photo handing the stuff over so they'll say, what a great church you are.

As with giving, so with praying. Look at verse 5 onwards. 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 others.

Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. He's saying we mustn't be play actors as a church, playing a role. In the synagogue back then, that's like the public meeting, there's loads of people to watch you pray.

And on a street corner, you could be seen down two streets, not just one. And so these people who Jesus is talking about, don't be like them. As they pray, they're not actually relating to their Heavenly Father.

[6 : 31] They're kind of secretly looking right and left, trying to impress, is anyone looking at me? Like so much of religious practice around the world, showing off so that other people think you're holy.

I read this verse, I thought, what about us? I don't think I've actually seen any of us on the corner of Chieftain Way and Central Avenue praying out loud. I'm not sure you'd do that.

I think these days no one would be impressed. They'd think you're a nutcase. But you see what Jesus is getting at in this verse here. He's puncturing public religious show.

In a church meeting or a small group, when you pray loudly, or try to put on an authentic prayer voice, or you look for the right things to say, the turn of phrase, the clever idea in your prayers. Jesus says, we mustn't be play actors, praying to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, end of verse 5, you pray like that and you've received your reward in full.

[7 : 38] People might be impressed with us, or they might not, but that's all you get. So, what should we do, Jesus? We should stay in and pray secretly.

In verse 6, Jesus speaks to you individually, just you. Disciple of Jesus, do this. 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. Your room here, it's like a storeroom or an inner room or a bedroom, somewhere that you can go to and close the door and be by yourself in secret where no one else at all can see you or will know you.

Apart from your unseen Heavenly Father who sees you. And in your secret place, pray to him.

Speak to the one who sees you. What Jesus is saying is, when we have a Heavenly Father and our religion isn't just show, we're to find ourselves praying in private to him.

[8 : 58] When I was a boy, my dad and I used to sing together in a church choir and it was the big thing we kind of went out and did. And at choir practice, you'd have seen us, me and my dad, getting on well together.

How strange it would have been if I chatted to him loads at choir practice, all smiles when others were around. But when we got home in private, I blanked him.

Nothing. Would have kind of shown that in public at choir practice, I was just play acting really with my dad. Because the proof of our relationship is how we relate in private when no one's looking.

Same thing with the living God. Mustn't be play actors just joining in prayers at church. I should say, I read this verse sometimes and I instantly think, oh no, that Jesus is trying to weigh me down with guilt.

Because if you've been a Christian for a week or ten years, all of us will say at some point we really should pray more. We should pray more in private. Oh dear. But I think actually verse six is meant to be a beautiful verse.

[10 : 11] To draw us in and attract us. Do you not think? Think of it like this. Can you picture yourself doing this?

I wonder where would be your room or secret place? Just if you thought about it now. I'm sitting on your bed maybe. Or in the living room when others are out.

Or in the car at lunchtime. And if you can, if you know of a kind of secret place that's yours, could you picture yourself there? And it's early morning or middle of the day or late at night, it doesn't matter.

But you're by yourself. Just as you are in your messy room and no one's looking. And you're quiet in your secret place.

And you hear yourself breathing. in that secret, ordinary place, you're in the presence of almighty God. Your father enthroned in heaven.

[11 : 18] And as you sit in your secret place and you open your mouth and you speak to him, you're communing with your God. And his eyes are on you, his dearly loved child, as you pour out your heart to your father.

Isn't that wonderful that you can do that? And as we pray to him, Jesus says here, our father will reward us.

A sense of his pleasure and his approval. The joy of knowing him more deeply. The peace he gives you as you cast your anxieties on him.

The assurance of his fatherly love. Ultimately, the reward of seeing his face. Jesus says, pray to your father.

St John's Orchard Park, individuals, pray to your father secretly. And pray straightforwardly.

Because in these verses, having taught us where to pray, Jesus continues with how to pray.

[12 : 33] Look at this with me in verse 7 onwards. When you pray, don't keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they'll be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your father knows what you need before you ask him.

Pagans here, strange word, it means those who don't really know the true and living God. People who worship, false gods. The kind of gods you imagine, you've got to manipulate and badger into doing things for us.

And so you babble and heap up empty phrases and pray and pray words and words and words to them to try and get something out of them. A prayer wheel with mantras wrapped around it and you spin it, speaking the prayers over and over again.

Or a prayer marathon. We'll do an all-nighter and we'll make sure there's always someone doing a one-hour slot and we'll keep the prayer fires burning till he answers. Or I sit in my chair just babbling through a few stock phrases.

Right, that's five minutes. Amen. I'm done. I'm off. All of that, treating God as less than he is. Don't be like the pagans, verse 8, because your father knows what you need before you ask him.

[13 : 53] We have a loving, heavenly father who knows us better than we know ourselves and he knows exactly what we need as individuals and as a church before we even say so.

And so, in our secret place, we're called to speak to him straightforwardly. Our father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

And what we're talking about this morning is how we can do God's will over these coming years as a church. Matthew 6, not what I expected to say this morning, but here it is. Go inside where no one sees and pray.

Imagine us doing this here. You know how with Google Maps you can choose satellite mode. You type in Cottenham or Arbury Road or Orchard Park and then from directly above you can zoom down and in.

And on satellite mode you can actually see individual houses and you can see the colour of your car and the top of your head if you're standing outside at the right moment. You know that? You're kind of looking down from above onto Orchard Park.

[15 : 10] Imagine looking down and you zoom in and in and there in Cranesbill Close, say, sitting by himself in a room is a man praying secretly to the Lord of heaven and earth.

And you zoom up from Cranesbill Close and then you go over to Flack End and you zoom down and there's a little boy kneeling by his bedside with his eyes screwed shut.

Mum and Dad wonder why it's quiet up there but he's not actually playing video games. He's actually praying to his father kneeling by his bedside. Beautiful.

And then zooming out again you notice little pinpricks everywhere on Astor Way and Icen Way and Engledow Drive and down Arbury Road and Northfield Avenue and on Discovery Way and Campkin Road and Ribston Way and Humberston Road and Normanton Way and Lamb's Lane to name but a few.

dotted throughout Orchard Park and beyond disciples each in their room secretly praying to their unseen father.

[16 : 26] Now you won't see photos of that on our website and there'll be no Well Done The Church on the Inside Orchard Park Facebook page but we're not aiming to be seen by other people.

we're praying secretly and straightforwardly to our father and as we're there in our little secret rooms nine foot by nine foot with a roof over our heads do you know the kind of stuff we're praying? Verse 9 Our father in heaven hallowed be your name your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven and on which in your tiny room is such a massive whole of everything God-centred prayer to shape how we pray for ourselves Father in heaven please please help us honour and adore you as we should help me follow King Jesus and do his will your son commands us to have no hatred in our hearts and no lust in our looks and to love our enemies and I see this in Jesus' teaching here please help me may my attitudes please you and bring honour to you and give me my bread and forgive me and save me from evil ways Father

Amen you pray something like that the kind of Lord's Prayer prayer prayer that shapes how we pray for our community in your room by yourself no one knows our Father every person here in Orchard Park is created for you and you're rightly angry when people dishonour you please would your kingdom come here give us opportunities to explain the good news of Jesus Christ may many this year receive Jesus as Lord I pray your will would be done in Icen way and in each household people will love to obey you and pray for their needs and sing your praises Amen pray a prayer like this looking forward in your secret place our Father in heaven we long for the day to come when earth will be like heaven and your kingdom comes may all opposition to you end may we do your will perfectly Father make us utterly pure and loving like Jesus may the whole earth bow before you our King and God and worship you freely and may your name be hallowed forever

Amen on our knees in our secret place our God is above us and we're praying for everything that God would act for our eternal good and the hallowing of his name in Orchard Park and for all eternity we've got to stay in our houses in our bedrooms and pray secretly and straightforwardly and then what should we do?

[19:44] well the answer is briefly just as we finish in line with our prayers and in line with Jesus' commands maybe we cannot but having prayed those kind of prayers in secret we're meant to get out don't just stay in get out and live salty bright lives stay in and pray get out and live which is Matthew 5 13 to 16 from a few Sundays ago just back a page in our Bibles let me just remind us of one or two things that we said back then look at this Matthew 5 13 to 16 to Christian disciples Jesus declares you are the salt of the earth you you are the light of the world you so like the bite and taste of salt on oven chips and like the blazing light of a town on a hill we've been made to be different we've been saved to be different to stand out just as salty salt is good and light on a stand gives light to everyone in the house so says Jesus in verse 16 in the same way let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven so if you can picture this having knelt by your bed in private and prayed for God's kingdom to come and his will to be done we are meant to be up and out and be in our neighbourhood and the workplace and the home and at school and out with friends living salty bright lives and doing God's will so at 10 past 11 at 20 to 12 tomorrow morning wherever we are we won't insist on our rights but we'll let others go before us we'll treat other people as people rather than sex objects we will refuse to take revenge we will love the person in our class who hates us and we will pray for them we will forgive people who do us wrong because we've been forgiven we'll refuse to worry overly about the stresses coming our way because we know that our father is in charge and rather than judging the person in front of us we'll think rightly about our own faults we'll do the sermon on the mount in a workplace or on a street of self-promotion anxiety grudge and judgment we'll live differently we'll live the beautiful way

Jesus' way the way of the kingdom salty bright distinctive living for him because God's purpose for a Christian community is to shine out into the world so that others see and so we really mustn't blend in and we really mustn't hide away we mustn't be a bunch of Christian lamps in a lamp shop talking about being good lamps no no no let your light shine before others so that well finally end of verse 16 so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven because Jesus' end goal is that through our having prayed out in the world salty bright lives that through that this estate and our neighbourhoods and our friends will see and taste that God is good that the world will taste and see something in Jesus' disciples so unsettling and attractive and good that they themselves find themselves drawn to churches and drawn to Jesus to listen to his words and then choose themselves to become his disciples and live for his glory

Matthew 6 and Matthew 5 I've never really thought about these two passages together but this is not remarkable actually that in secret we pray hallowed be your name your kingdom come your will be done and our father answers our prayers he answers the prayers of his children by using the

lives of his children as a shining display that attracts people to our father in heaven to bow before him and hallow his name he uses us the church to fulfil the prayers we pray for his kingdom to come and his will to be done on earth as in heaven so a question for us St John's Orchard Park I'm so thankful to the Lord for ten years and bringing us through to this point it's not well done us we say thank you to one another for serving and giving and praying and bearing with one another thank you our Lord for your work in us and here we are as we look forward over this coming ten years just simply will we listen to our Lord and do what he says will we stay in and pray secretly and straightforwardly to our father who sees us and knows what we need and then will we get out and live salty bright lives that more and more people may discover the wonderful grace that we've experienced and they turn and themselves glorify our father in heaven with us and let me lead us in a prayer let's pray together let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven our father we praise and thank you this morning that we don't deserve this but you have included us as members of the kingdom of Jesus Christ and we have been forgiven we've been brought into your family we have you as our heavenly father and in the secret place you see us and you know what we need before we ask and your great desire and unstoppable plan is for your kingdom to come and your name to be hallowed and you call us to live distinctly and differently so that others may see and come and turn to you what a privilege to be included in your plans for all eternity we place ourselves before you we place this church family bought with the precious blood of your son before you please work in us please use us please make us secret prayers and salty livers and work through us in this community we ask in Jesus name
Amen that that!