

Summer on the Mount “Hypocrisy Redefined” Matthew 6:1-18, 8/4/19

Last Sunday I left you with a challenge- are you willing to follow Jesus when he said- Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you? Not just those who are your people, your own family, your friend group, your faith group, your political party. But willing to love your enemies, love the other side, even those who talk bad about you, mistreat you? I received an email from a member of the church who wanted me to pray for her to show love for the young man who killed her brother several years ago. This is real Christianity, not the fluff. May Christ motivate our hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit toward radical love.

Today we are looking at Matthew 6:1-18. Many of us have probably been to Chinatown in NYC and have been mobbed by the street vendors selling the knock off brand gear, watches, sunglasses, shoes. An authentic Coach bag that costs \$500, you can get the imitation for under \$50 that looks virtually identical. **Let's see if you can tell the difference...** Today, Jesus is going to show us the difference between **Imitation vs. Authentic Religion** because Jesus is going to call out hypocrisy. As soon as we hear hypocrisy, the tendency is to picture someone else. We immediately look to judge other people. Oh, I hope so and so is listening to this. I am going to direct message this sermon to....But this message is not for everyone else, this message is for you and me today. It is really easy to see hypocrisy in others, but are you able to see it in yourself? Here's the deal, there are aspects of hypocrisy to varying degrees that lie in the corners of all of our hearts, whether you are a devout Christian, just checking out faith, or don't believe in God. I believe Jesus speaks authenticity to the human tendency to be fake like that coach bag. Jesus is going to contrast imitation vs. authentic religion using three common religious practices: Giving, Praying and Fasting.

Imitation vs. Authentic Giving

¹“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. 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 honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.”

We use this word hypocrisy quite a bit, but let's make sure we understand what it means. Being a hypocrite doesn't mean that you sometimes make bad decisions and don't live up to what you believe. That isn't hypocrisy, that's falling short, that's called sin...and it is why we need a savior in the first place. No, a hypocrite is different. This term is a transliteration right from the Greek- Hypocrites, a Greek actor in the theater. The hypocrites were the actors that would literally wear masks to play a part for an audience- comedy or tragedy. Cleverly, Jesus borrows this word to describe imitation religion. Someone putting on a show of faith for the applause of others, but inwardly and privately they have no relationship with God.

This is what we encounter in this satirical example of giving. Jesus depicts the hypocrite as the one who pulls out the trumpet and announces that he is giving to the poor. What's his point? Imitation religion is all about recognition. If you are giving money, even to wonderful causes that help the most disenfranchised and at risk, but you are doing it for the wrong reasons, if

you are giving to get noticed, it's really not giving at all, it's just getting. It's an exchange, you are paying \$ for attention, for accolades, for your name in the paper or likes on your Instagram page. And that is the reward, Jesus says. It is instant gratification, not lasting.

Authentic giving however described in v. 3.

³ *But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

Authentic giving is motivated not by being seen by people but being seen by God. See it's all about your relationship with God, that's your reward. And for God, how you give matters more than what you give. And authentic giving comes from gratitude to what God has given to us and because God owns it all anyway. Don't get legalistic about this. The issue is not so much the visibility of the giving but the intent. Giving is transformed into hypocrisy when the intent is self-promotion. So, when you give, serve a charity, make a donation- **Do you care who gets the credit?** If no one thanked you or saw or heard about it?

Imitation vs. Authentic Prayer

⁵ *"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.*

Jewish people in Jesus' day prayed three times a day, before bed, when they arose, and midday- roughly 3pm. That means these hypocrites Jesus was referring to strategically placed themselves in very public places for the prayer times. Fake faith performs prayers for people.

Authentic Prayer instead-

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.*

My wife and I were on a date night recently, now imagine if I came in, got our table and then I stood up and said, excuse me everyone- I want you to know that I took my wife on a date night. We could have ordered takeout, we could have gone through a drive through...but no. I want you to know how much I love her, how beautiful she is to me and that I don't deserve such a wonderful wife. Applause, shook everyone's hands and talked to everyone else the rest of the night telling stories of how great of a husband I am. You might slap me, if Shannan didn't first. What does Shannan want? She wants me, she wants my undivided time. The date is an opportunity to connect in a special way. Listen- this is an amazing truth...ready? What God wants more than anything is...you! So, if the only time you pray is in public, reciting a creed or the Lord's prayer, or before family dinner...what might that say about your relationship with God? I suggest that you set aside time every day or maybe a couple times a day where it is just you and the Lord, no distracts, you smartphones, put TV on for the kids or get them outside, because that's when you can focus and concentrate on what God's just trying to say to you in that time you set aside. He speaks not in the noise, but in the silence!

Jesus goes on to give us a model of prayer what we call the Lord's Prayer and encourages us to pray simply and meaningfully to God like a child would with his or her own Father. We don't have time to study this prayer but let me just say, if you struggle to know how to pray- this is a great place to start.

Imitation vs. Authentic Fasting

¹⁶ *"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."*

Fasting is a spiritual discipline where you refrain from food or water, or both, for a limited period of time, not as part of a weight loss strategy, but in response to grievous moment or in anticipation of a significant moment. Maybe a personal, community or national tragedy. Or before a significant or sacred moment like leading up to Holy Week, or it could be more personal, leading up to significant decision about career to choose or deciding someone to marry. It was intended to be a way of restricting yourself to focus on...guess what?... your relationship with God. Has Jesus made it clear yet that true religion isn't really religion at all, it's a relationship. Well these hypocrites turned this highly personal way of connecting with God into a show. "Wow you look in agony, are you OK?" "Oh, I do? It must be because I'm fasting...to the Lord."

Authentic Fasting

¹⁷ *But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others 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.*

Clean yourself up, don't make it obvious you've been fasting. After all, if it is truly about your relationship with God, why would anyone else need to know? Imitation Religion is for the Audience of Many, Authentic Religion is for the Audience of One. Would you give something up to even if no one knew about it?

OK what about you and me today? We hate Hypocrisy. Probably more than anything it is the character flaw, the sin that we have the least tolerance for. Same with God.

Jesus reserved his harshest words not for addicts, for thieves, or the sexually immoral...but for the hypocrites. He has no tolerance for it. We can spot it in others, but can we see it in ourselves? Hypocrisy is incredibly self-deceiving. You wear the mask long enough, you actually start to believe it's true. Some people have been living a lie so long they don't even know who they are anymore. There are people who play church for years and years but never actually have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. They get good at the words, at the prayers, they get comfortable with it, like the people or the music or like getting noticed...and it's all about the social but have no relationship with God. Jesus will say, who are you, I don't even know you. It's personally dangerous. But it's also dangerous because hypocrisy inoculates people to Christianity. It dilutes the true faith and turns people off to the message of Jesus. Mom and Dad act one way at church and totally different at home. Some have walked away

from the church because of this. You say you are a Christian but then you don't seem to care about the poor, or are indifferent to racism, or you are known to be a womanizer at work. If you are playing the Christian game, stop faking it.

That is in the context of your faith, but let me broaden this out. There is another form of Hypocrisy that is more subtle, based on **fear of being found out.**

-You are the super-social person and everything loves being around your positivity, you have it altogether at work and you are killing it, but you are working so much that everything else in your life is coming apart at the seams, or you are hiding an addiction or depression that is slowly destroying your life.

-Maybe you come in here pretending that everything is awesome, you have the nice car and the nice watch- but really you are drowning in debt and on the brink of financial collapse.

-Maybe you put on the persona that your marriage is great, you even put photos of your perfect family on facebook, but you know (and your kids know) that you don't talk to each other anymore, you fight all the time, you are more like roommates than lovers.

-Maybe you know all the right Christian words and prayers and attend a Bible study but you secretly have doubts or are subtly believing lies about your faith.

If this is you, do you realize you care more about what everyone will think than what God thinks? This is hypocrisy of the heart and God already knows!

How long will you wear the mask? Are you ready to drop the mask? There is hope! **Because Jesus may have no tolerance for hypocrisy, but he has unlimited grace for those who are ready to be honest and come to him.** Jesus says, he came not for the healthy but the sick. **Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy-** Proverbs 28:13

Get real with God. Pray- Show me my heart, test me. Show me where there is hypocrisy in my heart. And God showed me a few areas of hypocrisy in my heart. Ironically as God would have it, I knew I was going to have some friends visiting church this Sunday and I wanted everything to be perfect. I wanted the best version. I wanted their approval, what if I say something they don't like or don't agree with. But am I preaching for an audience of one? Ultimately, this is about God! If you are like Lady Gaga- You live for the applause...confess that. If you are pretending to be someone you are not through your social media version of yourself. Confess that. If you are not being honest with God and hiding your stuff from others- Confess that.

Get real with others. One of our core values is authenticity and restoration. We want to be a place where you can drop the mask. This isn't a place where we say, "I'm OK, you're OK, we're all OK." And everyone pretends to be happy, perfect Christians. This is not a country club, it is a hospital for dysfunctional people, messy lives, doubters, for people who do not have it altogether. So listen, I expect there to be people struggling walking in here. Some with socially acceptable dysfunctions and some with less socially acceptable ones. When the church gets messy it means people are getting real. It means it feels safe. It means that the Spirit of God is convicting hearts. And causing people to say, I'm done with the fake. I want the real thing. I want what they have.