

What Would Jesus Do: Live for Authenticity; Reject Hypocrisy
Matthew 6:1-8
April 3, 2011

In 1896 Pastor Charles Sheldon wrote a book entitled, "In His Steps." The book was a fictional story about various people/Christians who encounter situations and faced them by asking what would Jesus do in those same circumstances. Asking that question challenged them to live more like Christ and less like the uncommitted people around them. Almost a 100 years later in the early 1990's, that story inspired a movement of Christians to stress the need for faith in Christ to be practiced in how we live morally. To stress this expectation with his youth group, a youth leader created bracelets with the letters WWJD as a reminder for his youth to ask the question, **what would Jesus do** as they faced life circumstances.

This is a good time to come back to that WWJD movement. At this time of the year many Christians are observing the season of Lent. Lent is intended to be a time in the weeks leading up to Easter for self-examination amongst Christians. Lent is our time to look in the spiritual mirror at ourselves. We examine to see if we are living like Jesus. Do we ask often enough what would Jesus do facing what we face Are we imitating him?

So we start a new sermon series for this final month leading up to prepare us to celebrate to Easter. We continue to use the Gospel of Matthew to help us do some spiritual self-examination. Our Lenten focus won't tell you what comfort foods to give up for Lent, or television shows to stop watching or anything else. This month will use scripture from Matthew to help us ask ourselves what would Jesus do in certain situations and issues that apply to us. Today the scripture out of Matthew chapter 6 teaches us Jesus lived for authenticity before God; not hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is a big deal for Christianity as a whole to confront.

Someone said, "**How many observe Christ's birthday! How few his precepts!**" (source from quote garden.com, unknown)

Benjamin Franklin once remarked, "**O! 'tis easier to keep holidays than commandments.**" (Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard's Almanack*, 1757, quote garden.com)

As the holiday of Easter is drawing near many folks will be asked to come to church for Easter Sunday and they'll decline because they'll say the church is "full of hypocrites." There will be people who come to church only on Easter and some regularly church attending Christians will be tempted to look those one time a year attenders with displeasure because they only come to church on Easter. They'll think it is so hypocritical and we'll question why do they bother to come at all. But who knows when a person might finally let God connect with their heart in any given worship service on any given Sunday and this Easter will be that Sunday for someone, some where and it could be here!

Realities of hypocrisy

In the words we are about to hear from Jesus he addresses the spiritual condition of hypocrisy.

Read Scripture: Matthew 6:1-8 The Message Bible

Jesus was toughest on religious hypocrites:

It could be fair to say Jesus was tougher on religious hypocrites than any other sinful spiritual condition. He responded to the woman mentioned in the Gospel of John chapter 8 who was guilty of sexual misconduct, "to go and sin no more." In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 19, Jesus applauded the fact that a dishonest tax collector like Zacchaeus was willing to change his ways and repay those he had cheated. But Jesus was the toughest on the religious hypocrite, the religious leaders who dishonest about their relationship with God and their obedience to God.

The very word hypocrite "means to wear a mask." The woman caught committing adultery was no hypocrite, every one new what she was. Zacchaeus was known for cheating people out of money. But religious hypocrisy protects sinful ways behind God's name. Nothing makes us angrier than when we hear of terrorist and rogue dictators overseas who will use ordinary citizens as human shields to provide protection from being brought to justice. Jesus was toughest on hypocrisy for the ways it uses God to cover up the wrong in our hearts and lives.

The mask of hypocrisy and religion seeks to be seen rather than to see God. V.1

The reason hypocrisy in the eyes of Jesus is so toxic, so dangerous it also uses God to drawn attention and power to ourselves. Verse 1 Jesus leads off

his teachings by pointing out the motive of the hypocrite is to be seen, to gain the reward of people; rather than the approval of God.

Don't deny it is on all of us - we all have a mask:

Hypocrisy exist in all of us one way or another. There are times when we want the attention and the credit. We are not living as purely as our image appears. We are not as obedient to God as we would appear to be. What we would say in some one's presence; is different in their absence. The Bible says all sin, all of us miss the mark. If nothing else the mask we wear covers our fear to tell some one else how spiritually we are falling down and need help and encouragement. I believe this because in most cases we publicly or in a groups of friends will ask discuss physical illness and the need for healing. But we're not so graphic and direct about our spiritual battles.

How our hypocrisy gets expressed

Since this is the season of Lent and a time to look in the mirror lets consider some ways we practice hypocrisy and wear our mask.

Hypocrisy is practiced when we put our religious traditions before God's purposes. Scripture like Matthew 28:16-20, Luke 4:18-19 remind us the number one purpose of the church is to preach the good news about Jesus and lead them to be his followers. But some times we will stick with practices and traditions that aren't helping us to be effective to our mission. Our traditions may be the way we worship, the use of Sunday school/small groups, or choose leaders. But traditions can stand in the way. Our church wide meeting tonight to share about a process that has been going on with a group of folks and our discussions about the mission of the church to make disciples of Jesus. Anyone who is excited and committed to this church is welcome to attend to hear what we have accomplished so far and share your response. We do this so our congregation seeks to put God's purposes above everything else.

We cherry pick God's word or read what we like. We can be hypocritical in the way we turn to the guidance of scripture until it may object to how were living or the beliefs we currently hold. We come to Sunday school classes, small groups, worship services and say good message preacher; but then practice counter to the very words we hear. It's been said, **Your religion is what you do when the sermon is over.** (Quoted in *P.S. I Love You*, compiled by H. Jackson Brown, Jr.) We can talk about loving every one, treating everyone fairly, truthfulness, going the extra mile,

patience in the midst of adversity, trust in difficult times and then balk when it is necessary for us to put those virtues into practice.

Act as if we're serving more than we really are - We can be hypocritical when we act as if we are doing more than we really are. This one really got Jesus hot under the collar toward the minister types of his day. Later in Matthew's gospel, chapter 23:1-4 he rips into them and says, **"They do not practice what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves aren't willing to lift a finger to move them."**

Illustration: Jesus words remind me of a scene from a Mark Lowry concert. Many know Mark Lowry who has been a part of the Bill Gaither musical family. There is a little clip from a Lowry's concert that might speak to us, take a look.

Our mask of hypocrisy is worn when we lead others to think we are striving to serve God, we really want to be involved, yet allow others to do the hard work.

The last form of hypocrisy is when we pretend to care more about God and the things that matter to God; than we really do. The classic example of this is seen when people settle to leave their names on the membership role of the book of a church but never involved. There is no record of Jesus ever taking down the names of people who followed him and placing them in a book. **It doesn't matter as much if your name appears in the church membership role as it does your participation in the church's mission.**

Steps to taking off our mask

So lets take a look at how we can avoid putting on those mask in the first place.

"Beware of hypocrisy and don't say it can never happen to you. The first thing is don't be offended by the scriptural truth that all of us have some aspect where we are not genuinely living for Christ in a way as we ought to live. The very first words Jesus speaks as he addresses the issue of hypocrisy is **"beware."** Remember he was saying "beware" to his own disciples not to turn into the hypocrites Jesus saw representing God. Beware by being in prayer with God and others being in Gods word and being involved with the mission of the church to share Christ.

Call attention to God; not yourself. Jesus said things like, “**when you give don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing**” or “**when you pray don’t pray on the street corner but get alone with God.**” His point is be God centered and you won’t put on a mask. Seek to live and do so God is seen through you. Let anything you do and say for God point to God; not point to you.

Be motivated by gratitude. Twice in this passage of scripture Jesus says God will see what we do in secret that is good and will reward us. Yet the hypocrite looked for the approval of people. Jesus said in that verse that we don’t need to use long prayers because God already knows what we need. His point is that when God is the one the doing the blessing and the rewarding we have a true sense of gratitude. Keep the mask off and avoid hypocrisy by keeping before you what God has done for our lives.

Some of the most dynamic, life changing churches I have visited or read about are dynamic mainly because they get involved in the lives of others because of what God has done for them. They show up to serve because they want to not that they have to. They are motivated by what God has done for them.

Conclusion

Avoiding and confronting hypocrisy is risky business. Alfred Adler once said, “**It is easier to fight for one’s principles than to live up to them.**” (Quotegarden.com, Alfred Adler) Jesus confronted and judged the hypocrisy he faced and it cost him his family, his friends, and his ministry. But when he said he would lay down his life to be obedient to God, he did. When we celebrate communion in a moment, holding that bread, holding that cup is about pursuing the call to do what Jesus would do - in all things.
Amen.

Hypocrite: the man who murdered both his parents... pleaded for mercy on the grounds that he was an orphan. ~Abraham Lincoln

“Righteousness = inner transformation,” p.270

“Motive is more important than simple activity,” p.271

4 times within verses 1-6 reward is mention in a positive or negative sense. Religion is a mask its rewards are not eternal.

What do our religious mask cover?

What is the mask that needs to go?

Mask of commitment

Mask of concern

How do we check to see whether we are wearing more of a mask than we might think we are wearing? It seems one way is ask about what the approval of others does for us. Whose approval do we value most? Jesus said the alms giving and long prayers got

the religious leaders the applause of the people. Those that wear a mask seek the reward that comes from people instead of coming from God.

Think how dangerous this can be Jesus displeased some to the point it got him crucified. But it also revealed the depth of his love for God and us. Something to think about on Communion Sunday.

p.284 the commentator said our greatest motivation is gratitude because it is directed away from us, and it is focused on finishing what Jesus started. I wonder if there is a good story about finishing what someone else began. But do we want to finish what Jesus started?

p.287 good quote on humility by A.B. Bruce