

What counts is what is inside

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[0:00] I don't think I've sung it to that tune before, but it's a nice tune and it's a good tune. So let's make verse 3 our prayer before we turn to this passage.

Search till your fiery glance has cast its holy light through all, and I by grace am brought at last before your face to fall.

Amen. Amen. Well, I don't know when you last heard a sermon about hypocrisy, how often do people preach on the subject of hypocrisy?

But Jesus preached on it an awful lot, actually, if you look through the Gospels. Here's another sermon or address of Jesus where he talks about hypocrisy.

Luke 12. Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying, Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

[1:09] There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

Yeast. Jesus calls it. Why yeast? Well, yeast is alive. And yeast does what life always does.

It reproduces and fills its ecological niche. It spreads throughout as much as it can. You only need a teaspoonful in your dough to raise the whole loaf.

You only need a teaspoonful in a gallon of fruit juice to turn all that sugar into alcohol. A small amount of yeast can do an awful lot.

And I think that's why Jesus calls it yeast here. Because a small amount of hypocrisy can spread and do an awful lot of damage.

[2:20] We're looking at this last public address of Jesus. And we're looking now at these two verses.

Verse 25. Well, three verses. Sorry. Verse 25 to verse 27. Where Jesus particularly addresses the issue of hypocrisy.

In a sense, this whole address is about hypocrisy. But this is where he particularly addresses this issue of hypocrisy. And it's connected to the rest of the text.

So verse 25 is kind of about ritual, cleaning cups and things. And that points back perhaps to the law of Moses. Which we considered last week.

And verse 27. Jesus talks about tombs. And he's going to go on to talk about who is inside these decorated tombs. And who killed them in the first place. And we'll be looking at that next week.

[3:28] But tonight, this evening, we're going to look at this issue of hypocrisy itself. These two woes focus on the nature of hypocrisy.

And clearly they're metaphors. You can't literally have washed the outside of the cup and not the inside. I mean, how would you do that? But it's a metaphor. They may well have literally whitewashed the tombs.

Or some commentators say they lime plastered them. And probably the Pharisees didn't do it themselves actually. I guess they got somebody to do it for them. But they might have whitewashed the tombs.

But that's not really the point of the illustration. These are two short parables. And there are two.

They're similar. But they don't say quite the same thing. And so we need to look and see what each has to say.

But what at first seems quite simple, when you actually dig into it a bit, turns out to be surprisingly complicated.

[4:28] So it's going to take a bit to dig into this. So I've got a slide here to show you how we're going to look at these two verses.

So you have some idea where we're up to and how we're tackling it. So we're going to go through these headings. First of all, we'll look at what hypocrisy is. And then we'll spend a little bit of time in the Sermon on the Mount, thinking about act and intention.

And then when we've done that, we'll come back to these two specific woes, the washing up one and the whitewash one. And then at the end, we'll remind ourselves again of that warning to be on guard against the yeast of the Pharisees.

So that's how we're going to address this issue. So first of all, what is hypocrisy? What is a hypocrite? Well, actually, the word hypocrisy comes almost directly from the Greek.

The Greek word is hypocrites, which I believe literally means one who wears a mask. But by analogy, it came to mean an actor, a person who takes on a character.

[5:48] I'm not an expert on Greek drama, but I believe they actually used physical masks to do it. But actually, these days, we demand more of our actors, don't we?

We don't ask them to put on a face, a mask that they hold in front of them. We ask them to put on the face, these character. Have you ever watched Anthony Hopkins as Hannibal Lecter in Silence of the Lambs?

It's absolutely brilliant. Everything, the eyes, the facial expression, the gestures, the body language. They all scream creepy serial killer. I'm sure if you met Anthony Hopkins in Starbucks while he was in that character, you would really feel you were having coffee with some sort of monster.

What a scary experience that would be. But actually, whatever our senses tell us, we don't actually believe that Anthony Hopkins is a serial killer, do we?

[6:59] We don't actually believe that Daniel Radcliffe can do magic, even though it looks like it when we watch him on the films. Hannibal Lecter and Harry Potter are fictional characters.

They're not real. But so easily, we lose ourselves in fantasy. It's one of the attractions of online gaming and virtual reality, isn't it?

That in that world, we can be anyone we want to be. We can be Lara Croft if we want to be. We might be a middle-aged, overweight coward in real life, but in virtual reality, we can be a young hero with rippling muscles and a gung-ho attitude.

The only thing is, this is virtual reality. It's not real reality. And you might say, as long as we keep the distinction between fantasy and reality clear in our minds, then perhaps that doesn't do much harm. The problem comes when we blur the line, when we try to convince people that our virtual reality avatar is actually us, that it's actually real.

[8:15] And yet, to some extent, we all do that, don't we? If you think about it, we all kind of project a different personality in different locations. In church, at work, in the home, we do behave slightly differently.

It's almost impossible to avoid. It's our camouflage, you might say. It's as natural a way to blend in as a chameleon. And in a sense, we couldn't go out without our mask any more than the tiger could go out without its stripes.

That's what it uses to blend in. And you might even say that up to a point, that might be a good thing. If the mask is an aspiration, it can actually help.

I suppose you might argue that if the high we get from playing a hero in a video game encourages us to be fitter and stronger and more courageous in real life, then that might actually be beneficial. But the problem is when we substitute the mask for the reality, isn't it? When we pretend that the avatar, the character, is real. And worst of all, of course, when we come to believe it ourselves.

[9:35] That was the real, that's the real danger of hypocrisy, that when we come to believe it ourselves. That's why Jesus calls the Pharisees blind, as he does in verses 24 and verses 26.

It wasn't that they were putting on a show, as it were, but they knew it was all show. They were actually starting to believe it themselves. They'd started to believe their own propaganda.

In a sense, it's not that they were deliberately deceiving their followers. It wasn't a scam in that sense, when they traversed land and sea to try and make converts.

They really believed they were doing the right thing. But they deceived themselves. The deceit was convincing to other people because they had deceived themselves.

Verse 30. It's worth remembering the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, which is Luke 18. So I haven't put the pages up again, have I? But it's Luke 18.

[10:42] I'll read it out to you. Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself.

God, I thank you that I am not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven but beat his breast and said, God have mercy on me, a sinner. I tell you that this man rather than the other went home justified before God.

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted. It's only a story, of course, but it's a story with a point.

There's another story told about this parable which, again, probably isn't true but it's worth repeating of the Sunday school teacher who had taught her children about this parable and then said, now children, let's thank God we're not like that Pharisee.

[11:52] We can easily say that. We can easily think that, can't we? And the point is, of course, that it's not that the Pharisee in the story was somehow trying to convince God.

that's not what he says. He says, I thank you that I'm not like other men. He's not trying to convince God that he's righteous.

He doesn't see the need for it. Whose perception of reality is it that's skewed here? It's not God's. It's not even the tax collectors. It's the Pharisees.

That he's looking at himself in the wrong way. So we will come back. We're going to look at this issue of act and intention.

We think about act this morning but an act is important. But there's a bit more to be said about it than that. It's worth reflecting on these particular practices here just for a moment.

[13:04] As far as I can work out neither of these practices washing dishes or white washing tombs is actually a requirement of the law of Moses.

I can't find it anywhere. If you know different you can tell me but I can't find it. The law says a lot about washing bodies and clothes a lot about food rules and a certain amount about uncleanness from contact with dead bodies.

So these rules are kind of in the right ballpark but as far as I can see these particular practices are not requirements. But on the other hand you could argue that they're both a pretty good idea.

All right the Romans may have lacked our knowledge of microbiology but you don't need a PhD in bacteriology to realise that eating off dirty plates is a shortcut to food poisoning.

Romans were quite clean on cleanliness generally. It's a matter of common experience that you don't want to eat off dirty plates if you do it's going to make you ill. And tidying up your cemeteries is a good idea isn't it?

[14:12] We see these films don't we these American war cemeteries the Americans seem to be particularly keen on having tidy cemeteries and they'll have a guard and somebody who presumably keeps it all clean they always look clean on the films somebody must come and clean up and it's not a bad idea to honour the dead by keeping the cemeteries looking nice.

And so these woes are illustrations it's not that Jesus is condemning the practice as such he's condemning the thinking that the Pharisees are putting around.

They seem to be thinking something like this the rules of the Mosaic law are designed to make us holy and of course that one Jesus had referred to on tithing certainly was part of the Mosaic law.

But if those rules make us holy surely by adding more rules we're going to be even more holy. Well the premise is correct but not the conclusion because it understands it misunderstands the function of law and perhaps these extra rules are the heavy burden Jesus referred to in verse 4.

And it's a kind of thinking that Jesus consistently opposed throughout his teaching. I once heard an art historian saying that the Victorian the high Victorian view to art was that art was decoration and

therefore the more decoration the more artistic and that's why Victorian buildings tend to be very ornate.

[15:47] Well the Pharisees seem to have had that rule thought about holiness that rules make us holy and so the more rules the more holy.

But unfortunately it doesn't quite work like that as Jesus made clear on many occasions and we're going to digress slightly and look at this connection between act and intention.

Acts are important we were thinking that this morning Phil was reminding us that this morning and I thought while he was saying yes it would be a sorry word without hugs thinking this afternoon that's true this morning it would be a sorry word without hugs and kisses wouldn't it?

But then when you reflect on that you think but sometimes somebody gives you a hug to get close enough to stick a knife in your back. Jesus was betrayed how?

By a kiss. It's not just the act itself that matters the intention behind it is at least as important in fact I think you'd argue more important.

[17:05] So to understand this we need to look at some of Jesus' other teaching and a question actually that troubled the reformers and Puritans they wrote on it I've read occasionally read things on it that the Puritans wrote let me remind you of two passages from the Sermon on the Mount and it's in Matthew chapter 5 I've put the actual passages there Jesus says lots about various sins but the two I've just picked out are the perhaps two most well-known ones the most recalled ones the one on murder and the one on adultery Matthew 5 21-22 says the following you have heard it was said to the people long ago do not murder and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment but I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment anyone who says to his brother

Raka is answerable to the Sanhedrin but anyone who says you fool will be in danger of the fire of hell or a few verses later in verses 27 and 28 you have heard that it was said do not commit adultery but I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart now as I said this verse this wording of it actually puzzled the Puritans particularly because is Jesus actually identifying the intention and the temptation with the act it almost reads like that doesn't it when he says anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart but that is rather puzzling because if you reflect on it a bit you realise that that doesn't quite make sense you can't identify the intention with the act here's a few reasons why you can't before the act is committed you have a chance to change your mind you might have the intention to commit the act you might be contemplating murder but until you've actually done it you can still decide not to and what about this issue of consequence the immediate consequence of the intention affects only you the immediate consequence of the act obviously affects the victim and those around and this was the thing I think that really puzzled people particularly around the time of the reformation if the temptation is the same as the act then what motivation is there to resist the temptation how does it how can you talk about resisting temptation it doesn't make sense if you've if the fact you've contemplated adultery means you're already guilty then you might as well go ahead and do it because it doesn't make any difference and I say this puzzled people particularly the

Puritans and the answer I'm giving to that is kind of the answer that the Puritans gave although I'm going to express it in slightly different language and it asked the question therefore if Jesus is not actually identifying the intention or the temptation with the act what actually does he mean and we can get to understand this if we think in terms of the use of rules and outside appearances and that kind of is what he says we might the first thing you might that might stop us committing murder is the fear of arrest he who commits murder is worthy of judgment and the judgment there is clearly the judgment of a human court seems to be the implication we might avoid adultery because of the fear and shame of being found out and those things aren't entirely useless because at least they make us pause and think but what really matters is what we think next having had the temptation what do we think next do we ask what the rule is for or do we seek a way around it so if you start by thinking that the important thing is punishment then what are you going to do well you're going to go away and plan the perfect murder aren't you the perfect murder is the one of course that nobody realizes is a murder or you're going to go and commit adultery and find some way of doing it without

being found out so that might be your first thought that the rule is about punishment but of course you don't have to think very hard before you realize well that doesn't kind of work as far as God is concerned you might be able to avoid the police finding out that you've committed a murder you might be able to avoid your wife or husband finding out you've committed adultery but God will know and so that's not the pharisaic error they weren't quite that stupid they knew that God saw everything and so they found a much more subtle way of subverting the law had avoided that error just as in a sense the pharisees had avoided the error of open idolatry they'd fallen into a much more subtle kind of trap and they're starting viewing the command as a box to be ticked a yes no thing where fulfilling the letter of the command was all that mattered in fact they'd forgotten what the purpose of the law was and if we treat the law like this we'll soon find some other path that doesn't break the letter of the law but instead breaks its intent our hate and jealousy will be expressed in some other form instead of murder our lust might stop us committing adultery but it will still cause us to despise our wife or husband won't it we'll still be comparing the spouse unfavourably with the object of our lust and that's going to poison the marriage relationship almost as much as if we'd actually done the act and that's at best in fact it's quite likely that in the end the command itself will become despised and rejected if we're always looking for a way around it and in the end we'll just junk the

thing as irrelevant won't we like that law that apparently is still in the books that we're all supposed to practice archery on a Sunday afternoon we've just said no that's out of date we don't need to do that anymore we can do that with other laws too so what is Jesus getting at and the point here I think is that while the rules and commands are not entirely useless they're not ends in themselves and so this was the way the Puritans thought about this thought about this and I think they're right they suggested that the command against murder is actually meant to remind us to conduct our relationships on the basis of love and respect that it's not although it's expressed negatively it's actually a positive command the command against adultery is actually a command to honour marriage and to love our wife or husband it's those two perhaps that lend themselves of all the ten commandments to being twisted some of the others it's more difficult honour your father and mother though even that the

Pharisees had made that something about money it's kind of difficult to twist the command not to covet but even then you can probably do it if you try hard enough so I'm not really coveting I just happen to like his computer which is bigger and more powerful than mine I'm just going to have one the same I think you could convince yourself you weren't coveting when really you are the point is that these commands are really positive they're meant to make us live better they're meant to change our minds and our hearts and so it's our heart that has to be guarded and so it does make sense to resist temptation I think when Jesus says if you look on a woman lustfully he's not saying you know that's a nice pair of legs he's saying are you in your heart thinking that that woman [27:00] I'd rather have that woman or I suppose it was that male I could equally say that man than the one that the Lord has provided for me so let's just think about these two particular illustrations this idea of washing up and then the whitewash so verse 25 the washing up is the reference is obviously to the ritual washing of crockery before eating and as I said washing your utensils before eating is actually a good idea in any case it's hardly plausible is it that the Pharisees were really recommending you just wash the outside why would you do that and indeed how would you do that but Jesus is using the practice as a metaphor here he's saying that for all the good these rules are doing you and they might be useful rules but for all the goods they're doing you in promoting real godliness you might as well just be washing the outside because that's what it amounts to you're not worrying about what's inside where the real source of corruption is you're just making it look good on the outside so it's not really doing any good at all even if it was a useful sort of rule the way you're applying it is not doing you any good at all because it's not affecting your heart and so he says these rules were set up by blind guides and the rules were pointing people in the wrong direction the

Pharisees had become kind of spiritual bureaucrats that made holiness into a matter of ticking boxes true purpose of a questionnaire is to elicit information but if you think in terms of tick boxes then you soon come to think that the more tick boxes the better the form the better the questionnaire who cares if the data actually mean anything provided there were boxes to be ticked but the true purpose of a command of all the commands the ten commandments and all the law of Moses is to promote!

godliness in the heart and mind washing the outside of a dish is pointless because the food goes on the inside and so it's the inside that needs to be clean otherwise what happens when you put more food in the corruption just gets worse doesn't it you just feed the bacteria that are causing the corruption in the first place so the metaphorical nature of Jesus point I think is clear from verses 25 and 26 because they say the Pharisees are like dishes that are just washed on the outside but are full of corruption inside he's not really talking about crockery he's talking about minds and hearts and as we've already said corruption it's in the nature of corruption to spread and this metaphor of the whitewash has found its way into our everyday language hasn't it when something nasty has been covered up we call it a whitewash painting it to make it look pretty when of course it's all a mess and all falling apart underneath but again as I've said the practice of smartening up your cemeteries is a good idea whitewash or possibly some sort of lime!

plaster was put on the tombs and it's good to honour the memory of those who've gone before the dead but the Pharisees seem to have had some sort of idea that coating the outside of the tomb somehow has some impact on the ritual uncleanness that the law did indeed prescribe from contact with dead bodies their thinking was confused in at least two ways firstly how could a treatment that was designed to make the tomb look pretty have any actual relevance to the issue of contact with the corpse didn't make any difference at all the alleged cure had nothing to do with the actual problem but there seems to be gone a bit further than that they also seem to be thinking of the idea that if it looks pretty on the outside it must be pretty inside too but when it comes to tombs everybody knows that's wrong however much gold you might put on the outside of the sarcophagus then inside there's still death and decay and maggots and worms and bones just making the outside look pretty has no effect at all on what's on the inside so let's just think about this a bit more beyond your guard against the yeast of the

Pharisees that phrase actually occurs in Matthew Mark and Luke we read Luke's version at the start and Jesus gets to the heart of religious hypocrisy if you put yeast in your dough it will spread to the whole batch hypocrisy is dangerous hypocrisy spreads a little bit of hypocrisy didn't seem very important perhaps but it can easily take over the whole church it can easily take over the whole of your Christian life pharisaic religion was all about externals Jesus said that in verses 5 to 7 it's all about rules and rituals the ways of saying and doing things and these things of course are not totally without value but the risk is that they become ends in themselves one thing scholars had suggested recently particularly

[33:46] Tom Wright is that these rules in fact were regarded by the Pharisees as covenant boundary stones boundary markers adherence to them was what distinguished those within the covenant those to whom God had promised would be his people to those who were outside and so if you didn't keep them all then you were in danger of exclusion from God's love and that again suggests the more well Trump wants to put a fence across the whole border him if that's the way you're looking at them who's inside and who's outside but that was a very odd view of the covenant of Moses the one we were thinking about again this morning he was to completely miss the point of the covenant which after all was based on grace and mercy and redemption not rules and external experiences yes there was blood on the on the doorpost as it were but that was only an expression of their faith their trust in the

God of the covenant their readiness to move where they packed and ready to go was the real sign as it were of their faith grace works from inside out not from outside in so perhaps we could ask ourselves what are some of our covenant markers the trouble is once I start asking that question I could go on all night so and in a sense we perhaps need to all of us need to ask that question for ourselves but here are perhaps a few things you might think of what are the marks of our religion the marks of our church what are the marks of your religion and mine do we just spout the right

evangelical expressions anyone for tulip could ask people to put their hand up if they know what tulip means

I'm sure some would yeah a few do yes if you don't you can ask me afterwards but perhaps I say ask Phil afterwards tulip actually is just an acronym for what a sunrise called the five points of carolism or the five doctrines of grace they mark perhaps more than anything else what is known as a reformed church and you may be able to explain them all in great detail you may understand all the fine points of it and you do well to do that the doctrines of grace are important but do you do that so you can look down on other less educated believers or do you do that to remind yourself that we are all humbled by the grace of God do you make this a covenant boundary stone do you make it a marker you can easily go down that path

I have I'm not kidding you I have heard a preacher who pretty much said that if you don't understand the doctrines of election and grace you may not be real Christians at all and one of the hearers was so puzzled by that that he said are you trying to tell me that you think John Wesley was not a Christian or something like that to which the preacher replied well we can't be sure it's bizarre but it's only you know it's only carrying that thought to its logical conclusion isn't it if we make the doctrines of grace our boundary marker then we're missing the point of the doctrines of grace in fact beware of such thinking what about worshipping it's a hot topic isn't it the way you worship nowadays do you put your hands in the air when you're worshipping

Phil was demonstrating this this morning wasn't he some people do some churches everybody does and if you don't people say oh so and so doesn't put his hands up for the Lord there's certainly nothing wrong with the practice if it's a natural expression of the worship in your heart some people do do it here it's not a thing we particularly encourage but be careful don't start thinking that putting your hands up for the Lord somehow means that you're worshipping better than your neighbour who has their hands by their sides or gripping the hymn book it's really what's going on in the mind and heart that counts not what you do with your hands or what about you who keep your hands firmly clasped behind your back like I'm doing now or you are the one who's tightly gripping the hymn book are you thinking that secretly thinking that makes you more reformed than your neighbour we don't do that sort of thing in our church we're not happy clappy here the thing that really matters is the worship reel in your heart and you can grip your hymn book as tight hard as you like or you can do all the actions and wave your arms in the air as much as you like and that's fine if that's an expression of what's going on in your heart and mind but don't substitute the action for the thing itself what are the other things that people tend to use as boundary markers perhaps some sort of emphasis on the work of the

[40:11] Holy Spirit in the life of the church well that's certainly a good thing to be looking out for the presence of the spirit among the people indeed it is a covenant marker that's how we know the church in one sense it is the church if and only if the spirit is at work there otherwise it's dead the candlestick has been taken away but how are you going to interpret that do you see it in terms of external signs tongue speaking or something like that or healings or do you think the mark of a spirit filled church is adherence to the!

doctrines of our forebears there are passages of scripture that condemn both those attitudes those who put the emphasis on the more minor signs but those also who have lost their first love are both condemned in the scriptures and we don't need to doubt the scripture tells us what the evidence of a spirit filled church and what a spirit filled life is it's a changed heart isn't it Galatians 5 22 and 23 verse we all know but the fruit of the spirit is love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness and self control and Paul adds against such things there is no law there is in a sense a law of course it says those are the things we need but they're inside things aren't they're things that will show on the outside of course if they don't show then we will justifiably wonder whether they're there the things that proceed from the inside out things that really can't be faked and perhaps that's what

Paul means when he says against such things there is no law you can fake the tithing of Dylan Coomins as if you really care that the Lord should have his portion you might even fake innocence of murder you might get away with it who knows how many people have got away with murder because nobody has realised that a murder is what's been committed but you can't really fake love joy peace patience kindness godliness faithfulness gentleness and self control although I'm sure

that we could have a pretty good try but really you can't there are things that come from the inside out and that is the true mark the true fruit of the spirit or to use the words that Jesus used in Matthew 23 justice mercy faith faithfulness these are the matters of the heart and they will show on the outside verse 26 clean the inside and the outside will look clean if it doesn't then it's right to question the presence at all

Jesus said no one lights a lamp and keeps it under a tub that doesn't make sense either the intent must show in the action but the action must proceed from the heart a hug or a kiss can be deceptive but if it's not if it's given with love then it really means what it appears to mean keeping the outside of your dishes clean is good if it's an indication of the state of what's inside but don't confuse the appearance with the substance that's what Jesus is saying that's the nature of hypocrisy don't allow your actor's mask to be a cover up for what is really going on in your heart that's hypocrisy and wickedness and that says the teacher verse 15 is a shortcut to hell that is the way not to the city of life but the city of destruction justice mercy and faith let's remind ourselves to be aware of the yeast of the pharisees which is hypocrisy so let's sing again so it's 832 too