

Authentic Disciples

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Date: 31 March 2019

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[0 : 00] Now, I think one of the worst things you can be accused of today is that you're fake. We all want to be authentic, don't we?

And, you know, for me, people that have that fake smile or fake laugh, I'm sure they wouldn't say that they're giving a fake smile or fake laugh, but according to me, what seems like a fake smile just doesn't go well with me.

And we want that of our public figures as well, don't we? We want politicians, sports stars, pop stars, even our local leaders. That's why I think at the moment, Prime Minister Arden of New Zealand is popular right now because everyone looks at her response to the Christchurch shooting and they see how authentic she is.

Now, of course, I think we're a little hypocritical about all this because we want people to be authentic until we don't like what we see or hear. So Donald Trump is authentic, all right?

But we all wish that he would keep his thoughts to himself. Well, this week, Jesus teaches his disciples what it means to be authentic. And it begins with a couple of threads to being authentic.

[1 : 15] There in your outline, the first one is the threat of hypocrisy, which he actually condemned the Pharisees for last week. But it turns out that it's not just the Pharisees who are prone to this, but anyone can be, especially leaders.

But first in verse 1, let's see where the pressure to be hypocritical comes from. So Luke says, Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying, Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

Now, Jesus uses the phrase yeast because what leaders do tends to impact the rest of the dough or the people. People in those days looked up to the Pharisees as role models.

Likewise, the disciples, they may not be leaders of the church yet, but the time will come when they will, and Jesus is preparing them for it.

And so as the crowds grow and clamor for Jesus, he knows that the disciples will feel the pressure to play to the crowds, to live up to expectations so as to be able to convert them.

[2 : 31] And often people demand a higher standard of their leaders. Sometimes impossible standards. And so the pressure will be on the disciples to be hypocritical, to, as it were, project a better image of themselves than they really are.

And let's face it, we all have that pressure, don't we, as well? We don't like our shortcomings, the ones we know of, at least.

And we sure don't want others to know of them. And so, you know, I pretend even when I'm not conscious of it. When I talk about my mistakes, I tend to downplay them.

But when it comes to my achievements, I embellish the truth, I play them up. And we may start with small things, you know, half-truths or white lies.

But when we start getting away with it, we become bolder, don't we? And we do it more often so that it just becomes the way we talk. But Jesus, in verse 2, warns the disciples of the futility of hypocrisy.

[3 : 37] It doesn't work, Jesus says. Why? Well, he says, There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be 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.

Now, I think this sort of works out in two ways. First, trying to live a lie or keep a secret is actually very hard. And so, eventually, the truth will come out.

And you'll get caught out. I remember as a young boy telling my parents a lie. I had skipped school or skipped something at school, which I shouldn't have.

And for days afterwards, I couldn't believe the stress of it. For a start, some of my friends knew. So I had to brief them on it just in case they started to talk to my parents or their parents talked to my parents.

So I had to make sure that they got the lie straight, the lie that I told, my version of the lie. Next, if my parents asked me something that was even vaguely connected with it, so something that happened before or after the event that I should have been at but wasn't, well, I had to tell more lies to perpetuate that original lie, don't I?

[4 : 56] And that's nerve-wracking because all my lies had to gel with each other so that they were consistent. I had to keep in my head this alternate reality of something that never really happened.

And it was hard to keep that imaginary chain of events all straight in my head and to keep building on it, this imaginary world. Well, I wouldn't tell you whether my parents found out or not.

You can ask me afterwards. But you can probably guess what happened. Well, the same applies with hypocrisy because when you're trying to live out a lie, what you have to do is maintain two worlds, an inner world where your true thoughts are and an outer world, what you do and say for others to hear and see.

And invariably, sooner or later, the inner world comes out into the outer world and people will see that it's not consistent. Now, the thing is that even if you manage to do that, to hold those two worlds in tension and you manage to fool everyone, Jesus also says that a second way that this doesn't work and is futile is because the person that you cannot fool at the end of the day is God. Come judgment day, all will be revealed when we stand before him. So yes, some people may successfully take their secrets into their graves, but rest assured, their day of reckoning will come.

[6 : 34] God already knows anyway. He knows everything that's in our hearts. But on that day, all will be revealed and we will have to answer for it. So even though it's futile, the thing though is that we still succumb to the pressure of it, don't we?

Why is that? Well, that takes us to the second thread to authentic discipleship and that of fear. You see, I think fear is often at the root cause of hypocrisy.

It's fear of what others think that drives us to hypocrisy. So Jesus continues in verse 4, Now for the disciples, their fear was actually a real one.

We started seeing at the end of last chapter that the Jews are now starting to plot to kill Jesus. And the disciples could easily be swept up into that.

By comparisons, I think our fears, which are more like rejection by friends or being mocked by school or workmates, they're probably mild by comparison. And yet, Jesus' wisdom in each and every case is the same.

[8 : 05] He says that the only way to conquer fear of others is to replace it with a bigger fear. And that's the fear of the Lord. Drive out one fear with a bigger and better fear.

So yes, there are indeed fearful people in the world, bullies, authorities, people with power. But Jesus says that the worst they can do to you is to take your physical life.

And here's where you go, that's probably bad enough, isn't it? Yes, it is pretty bad, and it's probably very painful. But he says that that's actually a fate that's worse than that.

Because once you're dead, they can do no more to you. But when you're dead, Jesus says, then actually another reality comes in for you to face.

And that is, we have to come before the Lord where all our secrets are laid bare before him. And we have to then face the Lord's decision as to our eternal destiny.

[9 : 10] And so is there a thing that's worse than physical death? Well, Jesus says, yes. In a word, it's hell. Now, I don't know what hell would look like precisely.

Nobody's come back from it to tell me what it's like. Perhaps it's how it's described in Revelation, a fiery lake. I've got two other more innovative examples.

I, for example, think it's perhaps like a pitch black thousand degree sauna where you're stuck fully naked and you can hear screaming all around.

But when you yourself cry out, nobody responds. And that happens for eternity. Oh, here's another one. Perhaps it's a bit like being stuck in an overcrowded train with your face squashed against the armpit of your worst enemy.

And the stench is foul. You can't move your head away. And you're absolutely famished and thirsty. And yet, you know, there's nothing to eat or drink forever.

[10:19] Now, I think hell is probably worse than that. I don't know how exactly. And a lot of people now think that hell does not exist. But Jesus here says categorically that it does.

But whatever it's like, if we ever end up there, then what we'll definitely face is the holy wrath of God, which burns against every wrong thing we've done without anything to shield us from that judgment.

And so it's right, actually, to fear hell. But more than that, Jesus tells us that what we should fear or who we should fear is God himself. Because when we fear God, then we don't need to fear hell. We don't need to fear others. This fear of God is actually a good fear. Or as I say in my bullet point, it's the right fear that actually leads to great blessing.

That's what our psalm reading today promises, which I've got on the screen again. Verse 1, Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in obedience to him. You will eat the fruit of your labor. [11:26] Blessings and prosperity will be yours. And that's the amazing difference between fearing God and fearing everything else, isn't it? Because when you fear others and evil, you don't get anything good out of it.

You fear and then you keep fearing. It's actually a curse. But when you fear God, the result is blessing. Jesus himself elaborates in verse 6, Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.

Jesus here is saying, Fear God and you don't have to fear anything else. Whatever life may throw at you, God will care for you because you're worth more than sparrows.

Now, of course, this does not mean that, you know, we then avoid all suffering. It may even lead to death as it did for Jesus and for his disciples. But the important thing is when we then face God in eternity, we will be welcomed into his loving arms forever.

[12:40] That's the great blessing we want. And that great blessing in and of itself will make up for all the suffering that we may have to put up with in this life. And that's the challenge for us, isn't it?

Because so often, we only look to what's going to happen to us in this life in order to make our choices. But Jesus is here saying that, no, we need to extend our time horizon beyond death into eternity to factor in how our actions today in this life will actually make a difference in the life to come.

Now, let me just say, too, as well, that when the Bible talks about fearing God, is not a morbid or passive fear as though, you know, we're just cowering in some small corner and hoping that God will leave us alone.

No. This fear we have to have is a positive and proactive fear. So go back again to Psalm 128 and see what it says. It says, fearing God is to walk in obedience to him.

Of course, as we've been learning in Luke, this fear then also translates into fearing or acknowledging Jesus, his son. We are to look to him as our Lord and Savior.

[13:58] And when we do that, we can then see why fearing God leads to blessing because Jesus becomes the very means by which we're shielded from God's wrath and judgment.

His blood shed for us becomes the sacrifice that turns away God's anger over our sins. And so, if there's anyone here today that you're afraid of life, you're afraid of hell, you're afraid of things in this world, well then, let me encourage you to fear God instead and put your trust in Jesus so that you wouldn't have to fear him when you approach him in the life to come.

Now, in the remainder of the passage, Jesus turns from the negative threats to discipleship to the positive, how we are then to be witnesses as authentic disciples of his.

So, verse 8, the first thing that he touches on is that they are to acknowledge him publicly. I tell you, he says, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God.

But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God. Now, first notice here that what Jesus says is we are to have a public acknowledgement of him.

[15:17] Now, it doesn't mean that we all have to wear I follow Jesus t-shirts, nor do we need to take a loud hailer and get onto the top step of Flinders Street Station and shout it out.

You can if you want, but that's not what Jesus is really saying. Rather, he's saying that when we follow Jesus, then what it is is that it shouldn't be a secret.

We should be open to owning Jesus as Lord. We should be able to speak about him and our allegiance to him as a matter of fact, just as we might say what we had for lunch or who we are working for.

Saying that Jesus is our Lord should be as straightforward and natural as that. Because if we truly believe Jesus in our heart, then it's got to come out and express itself outwardly, doesn't it? Otherwise, we're back to the first thing, isn't it? hypocrisy. Because what we believe inside is not consistent with what we say outside. And again, often the thing that holds us back from doing so is fear.

[16:28] But just imagine if someone were to deny their parents. I don't think any of you here do, but that would not be normal, would it? Perhaps as a teenager, you might feel embarrassed of them, especially when they cheer too loudly at your sports day.

But you would never deny them, would you? Not when you know they've cared for you and raised you and fed you and given you pocket money and bought you that iPhone you always wanted, maybe.

Well, if that's what we do for our parents, then how much more God, who has not only provided for us physically, but has given us his son to die for our sins, to save us for eternity.

If we go on then to deny Jesus, then something's not quite right, is it? It's inconsistent to on the one hand believe that Jesus has saved me and that's the best thing ever in my life, and on the other hand, to then publicly say, oh no, I'm not really a Christian, I don't really follow Jesus.

Because when you do that, it's almost tantamount to denying his gift of salvation, doesn't it? Which is why I think Jesus is sort of saying, when they go before the angels of God, that is, stand before God on the judgment day, I think that's what the reference is to, then Jesus will rightly disown them.

[17:57] Because they haven't, it's not that they haven't been perfect or haven't done enough to confess Jesus, no, but it's because they haven't fully received and acknowledge the salvation of Jesus in their lives.

Now, I think Jesus here isn't talking about a one-time slip-up either, and that's what the next two verses, 10, refers to, not two verses, just the one, two sentences in verse 10 refer to.

For Jesus says that everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven. That is, if it's a one-time, if you've been put under pressure or whatever, and probably for them it's when they actually were in the presence of Jesus, if you speak a word against the Son of Man but you repent of it, then you will be forgiven.

Peter himself did it, remember? He persecuted, he denied Jesus when he was asked just before Jesus died on the cross, and he denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed.

And there are many Christians that have done that. They have been persecuted for their faith and under pressure in the Reformation that's happened in China, they renounced Christ, but only to later then retract their renunciation and gone on to die publicly for Jesus.

[19:18] So it's not this one-time slip-up which you then repent of that will not be forgiven. Instead, Jesus says that the sin that's not forgiven is the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit.

You see, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 3, no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. And so we only come to true faith in Jesus and accept him as Lord because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

And so blaspheming the Spirit occurs when we are consistently and constantly rejecting the work of the Spirit in our lives. It's not a once-off thing but a lifelong thing.

If we knowingly and deliberately reject the Spirit's call for us to repent and submit to God, then that's what Jesus means by blaspheming the Spirit. Ultimately, it's a denial of Jesus and it's a denial of his work on the cross for us.

And that's not forgiven because forgiveness only occurs when there's repentance. But then Jesus goes on to say that when we do truly submit to the Spirit, then God is able to do his work in us by his Spirit.

[20:42] And the wonderful thing is we sort of worry so much about how can we do all this that God is demanding of us, speak up for him, not be hypocritical. Well, the answer is that when we start to submit to the Spirit, then God himself comes and empowers us to do exactly what he wants of us.

He will help us drive out the fear of others and instill a healthy fear of God. For the disciples, their challenge will soon be, as it says in verse 12, when you're brought before synagogues, rulers, and

authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.

Now, we probably wouldn't be dragged before rulers and authorities, but we will have other situations, wouldn't we, to be able to be asked to speak up for our faith.

Perhaps it may be at the after-dinner work drinks when we are asked why we only believe in sex within marriage as Christians. Or, if you're at school, you may be challenged by saying, how can you study science and still believe God exists?

But whatever your situation is, whatever situation God puts you in, Jesus wants us to know that God is not going to abandon us, but rather we will have God's spirit, even when we're caught off guard or unprepared to know what to say.

[22 : 15] Now, when I was young, I imagined that when this would happen, there would be some magical voice in my head, that would just put the words in my mind so that I'll be able to just say the right thing at the right time when I'm being asked.

Well, it's never happened to me like that before. And I think as we read the Bible, that's not what God is, I don't think that's what Jesus is saying is how it will happen.

It's as Sue was sharing earlier, it's as we study God's word, we use the tool that God has given to us, as we absorb the truth and internalize God's word in our lives, that those are the very things that the Spirit will bring to mind as and when we are called to speak up for Jesus.

The Spirit himself will help us to work out what is the most appropriate thing for that situation. And yes, we may think sometimes that oh, we've just said the wrong thing, but that's okay, because God is actually training us and helping us so that we will be able to speak for him.

Friends, I don't know about you, but we all struggle, don't we, to be authentic as Christians. We often feel like we don't measure up to God's standard, that we're hypocrites, that we say we're Christians and yet, how we live does not reflect one.

[23 : 45] Well, God's word for us tonight is, do not be afraid. The main thing is that we are to fear God more than anything else. When we fear him, we have confidence to stand before him one day.

So are we afraid to let others know of our sin and failures? Well, if God already accepts us in Christ Jesus, then we don't really need to be ashamed of anything, do we?

And if we have this fear of being rejected or mocked or killed for our faith, well, we can always remember that there's a faith worse than that, worse than even death, and that is to stand before God in judgment and be thrown into hell by him.

Instead, if we are Jesus' disciples, we have God's spirit to help us to speak up for him, but as we allow the spirit to work in us, then what also happens is that God changes us from the inside out, so that we don't need to be hypocritical.

We can own up to being not as perfect as we should be, and yet know that God is changing us, so that as we continue to trust in him, we actually become the things, we become the person that God wants us to be, and then we don't have to put up the front, we're just who we are, and what God is doing within us will shine out in terms of our words and our deeds.

[25 : 17] So let me pray and ask God to help us to do that. Father, help us to avoid the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Yes, we do admit that we're not perfect, and often we are fearful of what others think of us.

We also fear for what they might do to us if they knew we were Christians. Help us to fear you instead. Help us to see that we are safe under the cross of Jesus, and give us your spirit so that we will be shaped by him and be able to speak up for you.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.