

Sunday 18th May 2025 - Hypocrisy & Hope

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Date: 18 May 2025

Preacher: Dave Moss

[0 : 00] Good morning. It's good to see you all. I'm afraid you've joined me on a rather sad occasion.! You see, it's confession time for me, because I'm guilty. I'm guilty.

A survey carried out in 2022 suggests that non-believers think that Christians are hypocrites and judgmental. This is in stark contrast to Christians themselves, who think they are compassionate and loving. Non-believers thought Christians to be self-righteous, hypocritical and judgmental. Whereas non-believers admired the teachings of Jesus, they did not think that his present-day followers had any of these qualities. Why is this? It's something we hear quite often. Christians are just hypocrites. I've always excused this sort of thinking with answers like, well, that's not me. I'm not like that. And I know some lovely Christians, and they really are kind and compassionate. In fact, some of them are you, yourselves, sitting right here in front of me. So this view of Christians as hypocrites is so wrong. Or is it? Or is it? When I look at it, I am guilty of so much. Yeah? I like to think that I am oh-so-innocent, and I have got it all sorted. Yes, I trip up occasionally, and that is when I ask for forgiveness.

And then it's all sorted, isn't it? Or there's another approach. We're all sinners, and there's nothing we can do about that. And through his grace and Jesus' death on the cross, then I'm welcomed as a sinner. All sorted, job done. I can relax and sit back and enjoy being accepted into God's kingdom. But then my money is invested in producing more fossil fuels which damage the environment. This damage to the environment is causing misery to many, many people across the world, as their lives and circumstances in which they live are changed. They struggle to make a living and enjoy none of the benefits of fossil fuels. Yet, I can enjoy all the benefits of fossil fuels by driving my car, turning on all my electric appliances, searching the internet, and using my mobile phone, as I do every day. I'm guilty. I am guilty. For years, I've had my money invested in the development of nuclear weapons. It was brought to me, it's brought me good returns on my money, and has helped me to live more comfortably. And I try not to think about what the weapons might do.

After all, I'm not in charge. But I am guilty. I have had children making some of my clothes for me over the years. Children are cheap labour.

This is great because it means I can buy new clothes at a decent price. It's not always children, because sometimes it's women who make my clothes, and they don't complain too much, and they're not paid well to help keep the costs down. But at least I can enjoy cheap clothes.

[4 : 12] I'm guilty. I have fed my own children harmful foods, and indeed many adults too. I've bought into a food industry that has profit as its driver, and not people's health.

I have not paid attention to how and where this food was produced, and at whose cost. I do not question why a litre of water costs about the same as a litre of milk, and at whose cost.

I dismiss the fact that in Wales, 25% of children offered free school meals in primary schools do not want to eat them.

I just see them as fussy eaters. But I fail to realise they cannot stomach fresh food, as they're so addicted to high sugar and a high salt diet.

I am guilty. And it gets worse. Perhaps I spent my career as a teacher, a successful educationalist, who's seen many children succeed and improve their lives, finding good employment.

[5 : 26] I've done well. Or have I? Perhaps I too easily excuse the fact that some children fail. I see them as lazy, or just not interested, or limited, or with the wrong attitude.

But isn't education supposed to be for everyone? When will I recognise that the system fails so many? I am guilty.

And of course I could go on about so many issues which affect our world. My actions and choices have consequences daily. The impact on people is huge.

Some here living in this very place, and some living further away, are impacted by my decisions. But as long as I go to church and ask for forgiveness, that's all that matters, isn't it?

Right? Some of you will come up to me and say something like, Dave, just chill out a little. Don't stress yourself.

[6 : 35] Most of this you can't do anything about. Yeah? It's beyond your control. It's just the way life is. Yeah? We're all in the same boat. But what do we do with Jesus' words?

He is certainly not very tolerant of double standards. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees.

You hypocrites. You give a tenth of your spices, mint, dill and cumin, but you have neglected the more important matters of the law. Justice, mercy and faithfulness.

You should have practiced the latter without neglecting the former. You blind guides. You strain out a gnat, but swallow a camel.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees. You hypocrites. You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

[7 : 43] Blind Pharisee. First, clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees.

You hypocrites. You are like whitewashed tombs which look beautiful on the outside, but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.

In the same way, on the outside, you appear to people as righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. Sometimes we are in danger of becoming self-righteous, believing perhaps that because we go to church, we've got it all sorted.

We follow the rules and expectations and believe we're doing the right thing. And when we're accepted as a result, Jesus' hard words for those who live in this kind of reality are therefore totally lack proportion in spiritual matters.

Thinking that removing a gnat will really help. In other words, being obsessed with ourselves and what we can do, rather than the bigger and wider issues of justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

[9 : 09] The reference in that clip to whitewashed tombs is interesting. The tombs were painted white so that people could see them more easily and avoid bumping into them.

Touching a tomb would be seen as defilement, as you would be in direct contact with the dead. I find that really challenging for we're often reluctant to get involved with things, particularly things some people wouldn't be seen as Christian.

For fear, people will think badly of us, that it may taint us in some way. We don't want to be bumping into things that might cause us to compromise.

Instead, we're just subconsciously labelling them as to be avoided. If we're not careful, it's so easy to compartmentalise our lives.

We focus on ourselves and our own journey with God and perhaps nothing else. We then think that what is happening around us is of minor consequence, unless it impacts us personally.

[10 : 27] I can't do anything about that. It's not my fault. It's beyond my sphere of influence. It's the kind of thinking that leads us to turn a blind eye to just about anything, really.

The problem with that is that we slowly lose our grip on reality. We live in our own spiritual little world, often disconnected.

We end up consumed by our own moral certainty and righteousness, and not with the call of the kingdom of God. Throughout much of history, most people's moral thinking has been confined to themselves and has focused on personal evils of what is right and wrong.

What our culture tells us is acceptable has largely been ignored. What our social institutions, such as government, health services, education, and the church as an organisation, tell us it's acceptable, has largely been ignored.

What big business enterprises, such as banks, major international companies, even charities, get up to has largely been ignored.

[11 : 54] It's really quite amazing, if you think about it. Individuals or groups of individuals often get the blame, whereas institutions are seldom called to account.

Jesus, in this next clip, does not spare us any excuses. When the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne.

All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left.

Then the King will say to those on His right, Come, you who are blessed by My Father, take your inheritance. The kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you invited Me in. I needed clothes, and you clothed Me.

[13 : 03] I was sick, and you looked after Me. I was in prison, and you came to visit Me. Then the righteous will answer Him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?

When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? The King will reply, Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me.

Then He will say to those on His left, Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

For I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink. I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in. I needed clothes, and you did not clothe Me.

I was sick and in prison, and you did not look after Me. They also will answer, Lord, When did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or needing clothes, or sick, or in prison, and did not help you?

[14 : 23] He will reply, Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me.

It's so easy to look at Jesus' words here on a superficial level, along the lines of, if you see someone in need, then help them.

Of course, we would help a person in need, we tell ourselves, and we would give to charity, and help out where we can. All good. But Jesus appears to be having none of it, and the listeners complain, Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or needing clothes, or sick, or in prison, and did not help you?

You see, it does not wash. Well, I didn't see these people needed help. I just didn't know that my actions were causing suffering elsewhere.

I just didn't know. You can't blame me. I'm not guilty. I didn't know that these people were in need. You see, I didn't know that the bank I have used for 50 years has used my money to fund the fossil fuel industry.

[15 : 51] I didn't know that my bank invested in the nuclear weapons industry. I didn't know that some of my clothes I bought were made in sweatshops employing children and paying workers barely enough to survive on.

You see, I didn't know that the food I buy was causing untold harm to children and adults and creating problems along the supply chain.

You see, I didn't know that children were being failed by the education system. I did sort of realise that the world is rather chaotic but I never knew that I was sometimes part of the problem.

Ignorance really is bliss. Or is it? Perhaps this quote is a little more accurate and close to what Jesus had in mind.

Ignorance is not bliss. Ignorance is poverty. Ignorance is devastation. Ignorance is tragedy. And ignorance is illness.

[17 : 06] It all stems from ignorance. Well, this is all very well, Jesus, but what do I do?

We don't want to be ignorant. We're called to be salt and light. Jesus warns us in Mark chapter 4, consider carefully what you hear.

With the measure you use, it will be measured to you. And early in his ministry, Jesus quoted from the prophet Isaiah, the spirit of the Lord God is upon me.

He sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners.

What is demeaned by society is to be repaired. What is marginalised is to be restored.

[18 : 08] We're not called to join a private country club and leave people outside. we're called to reach out to those on the edge, to those on the bottom, to reach out to those who are last and tell them that they're first.

God calls everyone and everything to be restored to their full and true identity in himself. So what do we do?

Well firstly importantly we're called to pray. To pray that your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

In this chaotic world we need God's guidance and discernment. We need to see the Holy Spirit at work within us and all around us and we pray we do begin to see exactly that.

evil will never totally go away. The gospel tells us that the light shines on the inside of the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.

[19 : 20] We're called to hope and work and pray to eliminate evil wherever we find it especially in the great social issues of our time.

We wish we could eliminate world hunger. we wish we could stop wasting the world's resources on weapons. We wish we could stop killing people through poor health care.

But there comes a point when we do have to surrender to the fact that evil is part of our daily reality and our logical minds find this really difficult to accept.

The only real question is how to trust the light to receive the light and to spread the light. The crucified and risen Christ is the living and eternal truth that real transformation is possible.

Deep within we know this for ourselves Jesus redeems and transforms evil. Our main job is to face it in ourselves then absorb and reveal its tragic effects.

[20 : 31] instead of inflicting it on others. If we pray and ask God to help us understand a little more about how we can be that light.

For me recently it's led me to leave my bank and find a more ethical bank. It'll probably have little impact but boy oh boy did I have a revealing conversation with that said bank.

And it's led me to engage in a social justice campaign and education. I'm not alone in that and it's been good to share that with other people.

And there is progress. please I'm asking you please pray about what God is calling you to look at where you can shine a little light.

Where you can shine a little light. And I warn you that this is complicated. It really is complicated and really does require discernment and much prayer.

[21 : 41] You can easily think that getting an electric car is a good thing. But then how is that car produced? What goes into making that battery?

How is the electricity produced to drive it? Wind turbines are great aren't they? But they're made from all sorts of materials which cause damage.

Solar panels. They're the answer we're told. But then you need to consider who makes them, how they're made, and from what.

and at what cost, and so on. And even if I did want to do these things, can I afford them? Who is profiting from all of this?

It is complicated. I know I'll stop flying off on foreign holidays, but then what will the people do who rely on that tourism for their livelihoods?

[22 : 44] I know I'll shop for my clothes in charity shops, a good thing to do, but then what will the children and women who make the clothes earning a pittance do to survive?

I know we can ban junk food and force people only to eat healthy foods. It's an answer, but is it that simple?

As I say, it's complicated and it requires prayer and discernment. So here's a few things to consider. In this church, we support the charity Light for Children.

It is so appropriately named, for it brings light to children in Dorohoi in Romania. These children find themselves in difficult and almost impossible circumstances as a result of government and social policies which have left them in poverty and with little hope.

On the surface, the charity appears a drop in the ocean and supports just Helen and her husband cost us. But I do encourage you to look at their website.

[23 : 59] Helen is supported by people right here and when they work together what happens is truly transformational for the lives of so many young people.

Helen works with a system which is far, far from just and fair. And yet, and yet, not only are lives being changed, changed, but attitudes and society's expectations of these young people are also being changed.

The same can be said of Hazel who's just gone out to Kenya with the support of others. In an unjust society, lives are being transformed.

Justice is being worked out. But it doesn't need to be far away. every week here in church, dropping, or little friends for example, lives are being transformed.

A little more justice and hope is being added to the lives of many, step by step, in loving kindness and prayer.

[25 : 08] prayer. The question is really rather simple. Guilty, yes. But Lord, hear our prayer so that we may be people of salt and light.

Let us pray. Sometimes, dear God, this feels like a very scary, out-of-control world, ruled by silly, incompetent, and dangerous people.

Well, that's how we often see it. Meanwhile, undeserving fat cats prosper, while the vulnerable and disadvantaged suffer. Millions of us feel powerless to intervene.

Forgive us, for sometimes we see you as some kind of superhero who will swoop down to intervene, yet that's not your way.

Save us from the hands of the mean spirited, we pray. Help us strengthen the hands of those who seek a different and better way. We particularly think of light for children, Hazel, drop in, and little friends this morning.

[26 : 34] Fill us all with a passion for kindness and justice and empower us to hope against hope, to lean daily into another future.

Divine love incarnate, divine love incarnate. Amen. Amen.