

One Audience (Evening Service)

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[0 : 00] Lord, we pray, although this is going to be a difficult message, we pray, Lord, that we would have ears to hear and that you would soften our hearts to evaluate our own lives. And, Lord, turn to you.

Come to the light. We pray in your precious name. Amen. Hello, everyone. My name is Tad in Bowden, for those of you who don't know me. I am one of the directors of student ministries at St. John's, along with my wife, Nicole, right there.

She's pregnant. We're so excited. And so we oversee all of student ministries, so junior youth, senior youth, and Ecclesia, which is our young adults group.

And we just had our all-in retreat. This is our end-of-the-year retreat where all of student ministries go to Anvil Island to spend... Yeah, it's fun, Lawrence.

You're right. We had a lot of fun. So, where we spent the long weekend doing a whole bunch of stuff together. But one of the things that impacted me the most during that time was what God was doing in the midst of our young people in terms of three things.

[1 : 14] What I noticed was that God really put a... I can't say it any other way, but put blessing over our worship time, over the actual music.

And the kids engaging with it, you saw this heart response and this desire to worship God. It was awesome. And then we saw powerful testimonies.

We have testimony time at Sunday night where students get the opportunity to share about struggles and pains and hardship or whatever, but there's always a redemptive quality to it. And it was so good. And the last thing that I saw was what God was doing amidst the community. He was bringing us together and turning us into a family.

And when we were sharing, Nicole and I were sharing during testimony time, I was sharing about the baby and how excited I am to have the baby. And then I looked out at all of the students and I just started to cry.

[2 : 14] And I thought about, man, I am so excited to bring my baby girl into this family. I love you guys so much.

And there was this love on the retreat that I can't even explain. It was such a good retreat. And then I have to come back and prepare for this sermon. I leave that and prepare for this sermon.

And I came across this article that was deeply disturbing to me. And it's what I'm going to use to introduce the main theme and idea that I'm going to be talking about tonight.

And we're just going to drive this point home the whole way. So in an article in Christianity Today called The Real Reasons Young Adults Leave the Church, Ed Stetzer, the professor of mission and evangelism at Wheaton College, as well as the executive director of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, he conducted a survey of young adults ages 18 to 22 asking the reason why almost 70% of young adults stopped attending church.

The results are fascinating. I mean, there's a whole bunch of reasons. You can look it up. But of the young adults who dropped out, of those 70%, about 58% of those young adults said that they left the church not because of college or anything like that or work.

[3 : 48] 58% of them said they left the church because of one of two things. The people in the church or the pastor of the church. And when they were probed further on this topic, the number one reason they decided to leave the church, the majority of people of those 57% or 58% said because they felt either the people or the pastor was hypocritical.

This, to me, is an absolutely fascinating study. It's a fascinating finding. It tells us something about the effects of hypocrisy on other people.

It shows us that there is something inherently off-putting about the nature of hypocrisy. So off-putting that it literally repulses young people and sends them running away, not wanting to come back to church.

They cannot stand to be around hypocrites. What this study is showing us, I think, it just gives us an indication that hypocritical Christians are in a very real sense repelling people and destroying authentic Christian community.

So I think the question that we have to ask ourselves is why? What is it about hypocrisy that causes us to feel such intense distaste and aversion toward those who exhibit its qualities?

[5 : 26] Why can't we stand to be around hypocritical people? Our passage for today helps bring clarity to this topic.

In it, Jesus paints a very different picture of a religious hypocrite than what we normally imagine.

When I think of hypocrisy, I think of someone not practicing what they preach.

And I usually have in mind a sex scandal of a megachurch pastor or he's like cheated on his taxes or something. Or the religious fanatic who's racist and judgmental and all that stuff.

Yeah, those are definitely bad, nasty things. But Jesus' definition of hypocrisy is far more subtle than that.

And it's far more insidious than that. And it's far more widespread and common than we ever assumed. So this is what I want to suggest.

[6 : 24] I want to suggest today that religious hypocrisy is a malignant disease in the human heart. We all struggle with it.

And if it's not recognized in ourselves, if it's not identified, and if it's not dealt with, it will contaminate and otherwise destroy those who remain too long in our presence.

And if we are not willing to suffer the discomfort of significant self-examination and allow the light of the gospel to penetrate our deception, we will never be free from its deteriorating effects.

We just won't. That's my thesis. That's what I'm going to try and prove and convince you of tonight.

So here's what I want to do. Very simple. I want to briefly look at what Jesus says about the nature and dynamics of hypocrisy.

And then I want to look at what Jesus says can be done against our proclivity towards it. So in this section, chapter 6 of the Sermon on the Mount, 1 through 18, Jesus continues his teaching on righteousness.

[7 : 40] Ben Short has talked about this. Verse 1 begins literally like this. Beware of doing your righteousness before men. Now the kind of righteousness Jesus has here, it's not legal righteousness, our right standing before God, justification.

It's not that. Nor is it primarily moral righteousness. So, correct actions and behaviors and practices and motives that bring honor and glory to God and are aligned with His will and His kingdom.

That's not necessarily what He's talking about here. He's talking about religious righteousness.

Things that we practice corporately and practice together. They're things like the basic things that a Christian does and all religions do.

They pray, they fast, and they give. So, Jesus is talking about religious righteousness. And throughout this passage, 1 through 18, Jesus draws sharp, very sharp distinctions between true forms of religious righteousness and false forms of religious righteousness.

And verse 1 contains the key, contains the key to discerning between the true and the false forms. There, Jesus warns us not to practice our righteousness before other people.

[9 : 04] And here's the key. In order to be seen by them. Herein lies the key to understanding the nature of hypocrisy. Here's what sets it apart between the true Christian and the hypocrite.

So, what exactly is Jesus going on about in this warning? What's He trying to get at? He's saying that the predominant characteristic of false forms of religious righteousness, whether it's giving, fasting, or praying, is an intense desire within the human heart to appear righteous before other people.

This, Jesus says, is the way of the hypocrite. So, what is a hypocrite? A hypocrite, according to Jesus, is someone who needs others to see them when they are doing spiritual things and when they're saying spiritual things.

Why? Because their self-image, their public self-image, absolutely depends on it. So, you see, hypocrites are acutely aware of social and religious norms and are very, very conscious of how other people perceive them.

They tend to be overly aware of how they come across to people and they're obsessed with maintaining their outward appearance and image before others. And most importantly, hypocrites have virtually little to no inner life with God.

[10:34] So, here's the definition of a hypocrite. Here it is. Hypocrites are people who unceasingly engage in an effort to preserve a good, godly image in public only.

but who at the very same time have no real internal heart motivation or heart's desire to actually love and obey and submit their will to God in private.

With this basic definition in mind, this is a basic thing, this basic definition of mind will just go a little bit deeper into the dynamics of the insidiousness and subtleties of hypocrisy.

So, three times in our passage, Jesus describes the characteristics of the behavior of those he classifies as hypocritical. In verse 2, in verse 5, in verse 16, from the outside looking in, Jesus says that the hypocrite appears deeply dedicated to God.

he or she looks very, very, very spiritual and faithful. Jesus says these are the people that write the big checks. They attend church regularly.

[11:55] They serve. They take notes during the sermon. They tithe 10%. They even pray at the service. And Jesus is saying these people even fast.

I mean, they go the distance. Outwardly, Jesus says, hypocrites seem to live lives above reproach. But, as he points out later in Matthew 23, 27 through 28, this is all alive.

Outwardly, Jesus says, in that text, he says, hypocrites appear to others on the outside as spiritually healthy and alive. That's what they look like.

But inwardly, Jesus says, you are literally sick. You are literally dying. You're dead. You're a corpse. There's nothing in there. There's no life in you at all.

It's all pretense. It's all fake. It's all a lie. So, here's the first thing to note about hypocrisy. It will always appear very godly.

[13:02] It will always appear very godly on the outside, but will actually feel, when you're around it, it will feel quite godless on the inside.

This is because, here's why, this is because hypocrites are masters at disguise. They are absolute masters at disguise. In the classical Greek, what the word hypocrite means is an orator and an actor.

That's all it means. Someone who puts on a mask and gets on a stage and performs for people. So, figuratively, the word came to be applied to anybody, this is how Jesus used it, who lays aside his true identity and assumes the false one.

They are no longer themselves, but they're in disguise, impersonating somebody else. And because they are such good actors, it is seldom impossible to pinpoint what repulses us about the hypocrite.

and makes us avoid them. There is something about the way, though, that they engage in spiritual practices and how they talk to God and about themselves that just seems to us, it seems off.

[14:23] I don't know how to put it other than it seems off. Why is this the case? Why? It's because hypocrites rarely ever disclose their true colors to either other people or themselves.

Hypocrites are usually characterized by an absolute refusal to open up and in any meaningful sense about their sins, about their struggles, about their brokenness, about anything to other people.

They will not do it, at least not in any real sense. They might occasionally admit I struggle with this and that, but it's all part of the pretense. That's because deep down in the secrecy of their hearts, Jesus is saying hypocrites believe themselves to be without fault.

They therefore cannot stand the idea of their own brokenness, sin, and imperfection, and will do anything to avoid the discomfort of vulnerability.

So they are constantly doing this, trying to avoid and hide from the internal pain of their own sinfulness and imperfections. They deny their suffering by doing two things.

[15:43] They project their crud onto other people. They project their own sinfulness. Because they can't look within, they find it in other people. They're judgmental people.

They're malicious people. They're manipulative people. And on the other hand, they scapegoat. They never take responsibility. Ever.

They're always scapegoating. Always blaming other people. Their true selves hide behind a false religious pretense they present to others.

And this calculated decorum with which they lead their public lives serves as a kind of mirror to them in which they can see themselves reflected righteously.
And they seem to love and protect this image more than they love God, more than they love others. It's nuts. So here's the second thing you need to know about hypocrisy.

[16 : 45] Hypocrisy, it tends to hide and conceal its sins and imperfections behind a veneer of spiritual pretense.

A hypocrite's disguise is often so good, it seems impenetrable and undetectable. Hypocrites are literally hell bent on preserving and maintaining a good public image before other people. So others do not see what's actually going on behind the scenes of their life. So they don't actually go see what's going on in private. Because if they did, it would shatter their perceptions that they're trying to give out.

It would shatter their ideal of perfection that they're wanting people to view them as. Any fault, any brokenness, any sin that would expose it. So it makes it extremely difficult to locate the subtle sinfulness and maliciousness of their heart and the effects of their lies upon other people.

[17 : 52] It's difficult. Why? Because lies confuse. And hypocrites deep down, whether they admit it or not, whether they would classify themselves or not, they are liars.

They lie to themselves, they lie to other people, putting on a pretense, a face, a mask, you're impersonating somebody. You're in a sense lying. They deceive others as they build layer upon layer of self-deception.

And in order to expose the hypocrite, we must peel away the layers of pretense and get at the truth. Here, I'm going to give two examples now.

How hypocrisy affects the family and how hypocrisy affects churches, church communities, things like small groups, relationships and Christian community. In my brief experience, in my personal experience actually, hypocrisy takes its biggest toll on the family.

Now, here's what I'm not talking about. If you're thinking I'm talking about you, I'm not. I'm not talking about the family who goes to church and they leave and go in the car and the kids are acting up and they're being disrespectful or something and the parent has to come down hard on them, discipline them.

[19 : 18] That's not hypocrisy. You're one way at church, you're being respectful, but then you have to lay down the hammer. It's not like when your kids are acting up at home and you're having to quiet them down and use a harsh tone or something.

And the phone rings, right? And you're using a harsh tone and then you pick up and you're like, hello, right? That's not hypocrisy, right? You tone it on. That's not what I'm talking about.

Here's what I'm talking about. Here's what I'm talking about. It's much more serious and subtle, I think. People under the reign of a hypocrite usually experience some form of mental and spiritual sickness and suffering as a result of being within this dynamic.

The home of a hypocrite is literally like an incubator for evil to take root and for psychological disturbances and disorders to result.

So it's really, you can only see the result of a hypocritical home by its fruit and the effects on the children. In the privacy of their home, hypocritical parents will do things like, and this is not exclusively what we do.

[20 : 39] We can't go into everything that a hypocritical home looks like. But things like this, there's things like physical abuse. I mean, irrational outbursts of anger.

And you take it out on your kids. There's emotional abuse and manipulation. You literally make it so it's impossible for your kids to please you and they never feel good enough.

And you constantly make them feel inadequate and unworthy. Or we spiritually abuse children. This is the most devastating, lethal form of hypocrisy.

And when the child goes to church or meets with a pastor, the parent has a private meeting, this is an extreme example, but have a private meeting with the child and says, I know where you're going. Remember, keep silent or else. In public, the kid keeps quiet. He keeps silent about his mom and dad's fighting, their separation, their triangulation.

[21 : 53] They keep silent about the addiction that's rampant in the family. They have been conditioned to maintain this public priest tense established by the hypocritical parent.

They would never dare expose what goes on in the privacy of their home. Unless God's truth breaks in that family and exposes all the deceit and the strongholds and the lies and the

dysfunction, it will be extremely difficult for outsiders like the church because everything has always appeared from the hypocritical standpoint as it's okay.

Everything's good. How are the kids? We're great. We're going on vacation. It's awesome. Yeah, everything just be glossy and nice and plastic. No one would ever think to probe a little deeper.

That's the problem with hypocrisy. vulnerability. And not only does it take a toll on families, but it takes a toll on church communities as well. Real intimacy and vulnerability, I'm talking about real intimacy and vulnerability, is difficult to establish and foster when hypocrites are present.

It just is. Because they refuse to open up their lives to others. They never really talk about their sins and struggles in a very real way. They tend to make others feel unsafe around them and unwilling to be vulnerable and truthful about what they're going through.

[23 : 23] They prevent real relationships from forming. Because every interaction with hypocritical people is on the level of pretense. The community then feels, when you go to it, like this culture of mutual display.

everybody, everyone is literally just putting on their best self. And we're mutually admiring one another. We talk about our vacations and our skiing trips and what we did over the summer.

And then we get into this comparison mode. And we subtly make hints and try and one-up each other about all the things that we did. All the cool people we hung out with.

There's exclusion that's very subtle and malicious in the community. And I think the biggest thing about it is in hypocritical communities, they don't allow God's word to actually penetrate the depths of their heart.

We speak and then pray in this vague theological abstraction. temptation. This babble, as Jesus calls it.

[24 : 43] These empty words and phrases that carry no weight whatsoever. They do not touch down on reality at all. They do not pierce the pretense.

They do not get at our hearts. And it's all just a big show. And when people get in that, and they sit and they're in this community and they're looking at the Bible and they're saying, you have a real God who transforms lives, who deals with sin, who has dealt with shame and guilt.

And what are you guys talking about? You're talking about him as if you don't even know him. If there's no personal relationship. And it's literally nauseating. And you want to leave.

leave. Now at this point, you might be thinking, as you're sitting here, you might be thinking, I know someone, I know someone who struggles with hypocrisy.

I've been around someone like that. Or I actually know a church community that really struggles with hypocrisy. I really do. That one down the street? Mm-hmm.

[25 : 50] That is one of the symptoms of hypocrisy. Here's the thing. It is vital that you recognize that when Jesus gives us this warning in verse 1, he simply assumes that hypocrisy is going to be a real struggle and temptation for every single Christian who attempts to practice their righteousness in public or before other people.

So here's the third and final note about hypocrisy. It is something that we all can potentially struggle with. We are all, to some degree, are we not hypocrites?

We are masters of disguise and manipulation. We are utterly dedicated to preserving a good self-image before other people.

We all worry about how people perceive us, to some degree. We all try to cover up our mistakes and shortcomings, not make them look that bad. We do subtly deceive others.

Even in our accountability groups, we don't tell the whole truth to people. I'm not saying we have to, people get up on stage and share their stuff. I'm saying there's certain contexts where you need to be truthful and honest.

[27 : 11] And sometimes we're not. We all care far more about gaining other people's approval and admiration rather than God's. And we all try to avoid the discomfort of being vulnerable and opening up about what's really happening.

We're all afraid that if we do, people are going to think differently than us. Man, if they only knew what I was struggling with right now, if they only knew what I was in, dang, I'd be done.

That's you protecting a pretense. And maybe we have been hurt in the past. People have. They've rejected us. And it crushed us. And we made a vow, I'm not going to open up again.

But don't do that. Don't do that. Find someone safe. Find someone who's loving and caring and gracious and talk to them about these things. I know that for me, for me personally, this sermon,

everything that I have said, I have tried to apply to my own life.

Why? Because throughout my Christian walk and even before, general pretense has been a massive struggle for me. I love, I mean, people have said to me, Tad, you have a performative quality to you when you live, right?

[28 : 30] There's all these things like, you know, just talking to people, doing this, and it's not just simple extroversion. There's something deep within me that loves to perform before other people.

To love, to garner up praise and admiration and self-worship. It's sick. And I do this, and I got to apply this text to my heart and be like, man, who am I doing this for?

Who am I doing this for? Who is my audience? The reality is the world is my audience, and I steal praise and admiration that belongs to God and I keep it for myself.

Do you know what that is? Dude, that is freaking, you could call it, it's idol worship, but it borders on satanic. It's bad stuff.

And I think we all, to some degree, big ways, small ways, we struggle with that stuff. So how do we get rid of hypocrisy? How do we do it?

[29 : 40] Jesus tells us in verse six, and this is what he says, he says we need to shut the door to hypocrisy. We need to shut the door to try and maintain our self-image and shut the door to this outside world and what other people think of us.

And we need to go to a secret space. Literally, a room, a closet. And take off the disguise. Take off the masks.

Take off the pretense. And be real before God. Be your ugly, broken, vile, sinful, secretive, manipulative self before God, your loving, gracious, holy, righteous, heavenly Father.

And when we take, it's hard, it's hard to take off that mask. It's hard to step vulnerably into the light and be exposed by the light of God's goodness and holiness.

We will avoid that. That's why we run from it. But we need to allow him his light to scrutinize our life. To look at our sinful motives and thoughts and words.

[30 : 44] We need him to show us just how deeply sinful we are. And we need this. You need this. It's not just God putting on a big show and shaming you. What he does is he reveals to you the truth of what he has done for you on the cross of Jesus Christ.

And how God sees you as a result of that. And when the truth of the gospel penetrates that pretense and gets at your heart, the very core of who you are, when you understand that we are more sinful, that you are more sinful and flawed than you could have possibly imagined.

Yet at the very same time, you are more loved and accepted by God in Jesus Christ than you ever dared hope. And once you know that, how deeply sinful you are and yet how loved and accepted you are, you will be free from that insatiable desire to perform in front of others and to project an image of spiritual perfection.

You will be free to see yourself as a sinful person who's saved by grace, who can now serve God in others in humble obscurity as Jesus commands.

And when we live like that, I guarantee when we live like that, people will be, people will come to our community, they will look at our lives and they will say, these are authentic people.

[32 : 10] These are people who are broken, but they have a good God who is redeeming them. And they will be drawn to Jesus Christ. Amen.