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[ 0 : 00 ] I remember a few years ago, not long after Sal and I had been married, we had the opportunity to go on a holiday. It was pre-kids, so it was one of the ones that was actually a holiday. And we got to go up to the Gold Coast with some friends, so we worked our way up the coast, stayed up there for a few nights.

But the highlight was, me and my friend, as a surprise for our wives, got tickets to Dream World for New Year's Eve, which was fantastic because it meant there wasn't any kids running around Dream World.

There was just adults in one of two categories, either those who had wasted money on the Dream World ticket and were getting drunk, or people like us who had bought the ticket to go and use rides all day.

So there's a bunch of young adults running around Dream World going on all the rides, which was a fantastic night. But I remember it being a moment of clarity for my wife on exactly who I was as her husband.

There's one particular ride at Dream World called The Claw. Now, to give you just a rough idea of what The Claw is, it's a circle of seats with a big long pole coming out the top.

[ 1 : 05 ] And basically, it goes upside down. It spins around. It does full loops. It does all sorts of things. And we were watching it as we walked through the gates. And straight away, there was a bit of nervousness from me.

I don't mind rides. I don't mind things that go up and down. But I'm also quite lanky. And so when you strap me in, I don't feel like I'm actually contained. My arms and legs are going to go. And it just makes me worry that I'm going to slip out of whatever harness it is they've provided. But anyway, it was inevitable. We went around to The Claw first and queued up for that ride.

And I'm watching. There's some people who are smaller than me, younger than me. There's 18-year-old girls queuing up to go on this ride, thinking this is going to be fantastic, and cheering as they go around, and then coming off with big smiles on their face.

And at that point, my wife started to get a little bit nervous about this ride. And I thought, fantastic. So I began to say, look, it's OK. We don't have to go on the ride if you don't want to.

[ 2 : 02 ] I said, you know, it looks great, but it's OK. I'll stay off with you. Unfortunately, my friend's wife was like, no, no. Come on, you guys. You've got to come. Sal, we'll be fine.

And she kept convincing her. And I'm trying to play the really brave husband. And I'm like, look, it's OK, Sal. I don't mind staying off with you if you want. And this conversation went on and on as we're getting closer and closer.

And then finally, Sal goes, OK, I'll go on it. But Sam, you have to help me if I get scared. I'm like, yeah, that won't be a problem. That's fine. And so we're at the front of the queue.

And the seats are emptying out. And the attendant points to us and invites us to our seats. We sit down. And Sal's starting to get very nervous as the harness comes down over the shoulders and suffocates you.

Because it has to be tight. Otherwise, you're going to end up a suburb away. And she's starting to panic. And I can hear her breathing quickly. And so I'm like, it's fine, Sal. It's going to be fine. It's just a ride.

[ 2 : 59 ] Don't worry. It'll all be over really quickly. And I'm acting as tough as I possibly can. What happens next is, because this thing's about to do loops like this, they have to get rid of the ground. Otherwise, you're going to hit it.

So suddenly, the ground that you've been standing on disappears. And you're kind of dangling in these seats strapped in. Sal starts going, oh, I'm not sure anymore. I'm not sure anymore.

Internally, I was saying something similar.

It's fine. It's fine. It's going to be OK. This will be great fun. Just smile. Enjoy it. Open your eyes. And then we start to swing just a little bit back and forth. And Sal's eyes closed.

She's like, I can't look. I can't look. And I'm like, it's great. It's really exciting. It's fantastic.

Thankfully, she was next to me, so she couldn't see. But I'm playing tough. I'm playing tough. And then it's getting higher and higher.

But for some reason, it always goes slow on the way up. It's like it's building suspense or trying to punish you or something. Until we got to the point where we were upside down and hanging. And you know it's about to happen.

[ 3 : 56 ] But you're thinking, is there any way I can stop it now? And so Sal is like, eyes closed. She's panicking. She might have been on the border of crying. And I'm like, it's OK. It's OK.

And then we started to drop. And at that point, it didn't matter what I'd said, how much I'd faked, or what I'd acted. I squealed like a little girl. All the way down and around. Every swing from then on, spinning around. And I don't know if Sal knew it was me.

But when we got off the ride at the end, there were some other kids that were like, did you hear that girl squealing? And there we go. And I'd put on this amazing show of how tough I was and what a great husband I was.

But what's on the inside always comes out. It doesn't matter how well you pretend. It doesn't matter what a great show you put on. If internally something different is happening, eventually it's going to show up.

Just a few years ago, one of the greatest athletes of our time became one of the greatest frauds of our time. Lance Armstrong had allegedly won multiple Tour de France's, survived testicular cancer, brain cancer, and lung cancer.

[ 4 : 59 ] Had marriages and kids. And then now we know that what was going on inside was a man so twisted by a need to win that he was willing to cheat and compromise his character over and over again.

What is on the inside always comes out. When your reputation, the way that people see you, and your character, the person that you are when nobody is looking, don't line up, you can be sure that what's on the inside will always come out.

And the same is true for us as followers of Jesus. If you're not genuine in your commitment to Jesus, if you have a double life, one that you show to us here at church, one that you show when people can see you, and then a different one when you're by yourself or when you're with a different group of people, you need to be warned, what's on the inside will always come out.

It might be that as you arrive at church on a Sunday morning, you feel this pressure. From the moment you drive in the driveway, you are concerned because you know that you're about to be surrounded by a whole bunch of really holy people.

And so instantly, you switch on that bit of you that is nicer than you are at home. You switch on that bit of you that is more excited about the Bible than every other point in your week. You switch on that bit of you that is going to tell everybody else that you love Jesus the most, that you are the most excited about Him.

[ 6 : 27 ] But the problem is, if what's on the inside and what's on the outside don't match up, what's on the inside will always come out.

The message of the Sermon on the Mount, from the Beatitudes that we looked at last week and through the rest of chapter 5, is that from God's perspective, what's on the inside matters most. From God's perspective, it's the heart that He's interested in. And in the passage today, He wants to strip back that outside facade that we put on and show us what really matters.

Have a look at verse 2 with me. He wants to challenge us about some of the displays that we put on for the wrong reasons. So I begin at verse 1. Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men to be seen by them.

If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. Don't put on a show for the people around you. And the examples, verse 2, When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets to be honored by men.

[ 7 : 32 ] I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. Or verse 5, When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.

I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. And verse 16, When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting.

I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. These are good things. Jesus is in opening this sermon and saying, don't pray. He is not even saying, don't pray in public.

What he is showing us is that even good things that he has given us, even things that he has instructed us to do, can become just a means by which we put on a show for everyone around us. And the problem with that is, is God is not fooled. I mean, it is almost ridiculous to think that you would take something like this and twist it and make it a bad thing. But by perverting what is good, we have stumbled into the worst kind of hypocrisy.

[ 8 : 37 ] I mean, prayer. To pray in a way that you are seeking to impress other people is completely redundant. It is almost like me never saying anything nice to my wife when we are just alone, but in public being overly affectionate to her, overly positive to impress the other women around.

Prayer is our opportunity to speak to God. So to use it as some sort of performance to impress other people completely defeats the purpose of prayer.

And so today Jesus is warning us, don't fake your love for him. Don't pretend because he is not fooled.

And following Jesus genuinely means living for an audience of one. It means switching off that part of you that is nervous about what everybody else will think or say about what you do and focusing your heart and your desire on the audience of one.

On the God who is always there. But I guess the question we need to ask as we reflect on this passage this morning is how can you be sure? How can you check your heart and figure out whether or not you are actually praying to God, giving for God, fasting for God, singing for God, serving for God, rather than so that the people here at church will notice you and be impressed?

[ 10 : 08 ] Well, I think the key comes in comparing your private life with your public life. If they're different, who are you trying to impress?

Do you read your Bible more when you're by yourself? Or when there's people around who will see you doing it? Do you pray more when you're by yourself?

Or when you're at your community group and the people there will know whether or not you've prayed? Are you more excited about Jesus when you're alone and you are just reflecting on his grace to you?

Or when you're here and you know that everybody else can see what kind of a facial expression you've got? Do you give more when it's public and everybody can see what you're doing?

Or just whenever the opportunity is there because it is just your heart to be generous? If your public life and your private life are different, you have to ask yourself the question, who are you trying to impress?

[ 11 : 15 ] Because the only one who matters is Jesus. No one else is worth it. That's a scary finish to each of those verses we just read out. The end of verse 2, If you go through the motions of being a Christian to impress people, that's all you'll ever get out of it.

Some people think, Oh, what a great guy he is. How generous he is. How caring he is. How encouraging he is. But then they'll see someone else and be excited about their generosity and encouragement.

If all you want is to impress people, you'll probably do it. But is it really worth it? The Christian life is one that demands whole-of-life commitment.

Last week we looked at the Beatitudes and that God has flipped around everything that is success. Is it worth giving up all the things that the world is telling you matter if you're just doing it to impress people?

The only one who really matters is the audience of one. Your Creator. Your God. And He is always with you. The psalmist in Psalm 139 asked the question, Where could I go to hide from God?

[ 12 : 42 ] If I go up to the heavens, He is there. If I go down to the depths, He is there. If I hide in the darkness, even darkness is light to Him. God is everywhere.

If you are different when you are alone compared to when you are among your church family or among Christian brothers and sisters, I ask you the question, Who are you trying to impress?

Do you need to realize that God is there even when the doors are closed and you are by yourself? Or do you need to ask yourself the question, Am I distracted by something less important?

By someone less worthy? Imagine living your life as a Christian and convincing everyone you know that you are genuine, that you are the real deal, that you are serious, except for the one person who matters.

It's like being pulled over by the police with a carload of friends for speeding. And you work really hard to convince everyone in the car that you weren't actually speeding, that there's been some sort of mistake.

[ 13 : 53 ] Even if everybody in the car believes you, if the policeman doesn't, you're still going to get a fine. There are some really scary words in chapter 7, and let me read for you from verse 21.

Verse 21. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers. Can you imagine spending your whole life convincing everyone around you that you love Jesus?

Convincing everyone around you that you're a Christian. Maybe even starting to convince yourself. But missing out on the one person who matters. The God who made you, who loves you, who sent his son for you, and who will ultimately decide whether or not you spend eternity in heaven with him or separated from him.

There's an interesting little word in here which I think we can't just skip past. I was having a conversation with Mike Casson about this last week. We are challenged about the inferior reward that we might be seeking if we're trying to perform for the people around us.

[ 15 : 17 ] But there's the promise of another reward. Have a look in verse 3 and 4. When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your giving may be in secret.

Then your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. Or in verse 6, When you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your father who is unseen.

Then your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. Or in verse 17, When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your father, who is unseen.

And your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. It sounds like we're just trading a dodgy reward for a better reward. It sounds like we're getting paid for our commitment to Jesus. But what exactly is this reward? It's not the same thing as putting on a show and then getting praise for it. It's not that we give to the needy and then turn to God and say, OK, what do I get?

[ 16 : 26 ] It's not that we pray in private and then we turn to God and say, OK, what am I getting? What's the benefit? There is a fantastic C.S. Lewis quote which helps us understand the nature of gifts.

The proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation. What he's getting at there is that when we give with a heart that seeks to honour God, when we give that a heart that is generous because God has been generous to us and because we are grateful for all He has provided, giving itself is a reward.

When we are distracted by what may come, what people may think of us, we lose the benefit. When we pray out of dependence on God and out of love for Him, the chance to speak to our Creator, the chance to speak to the Almighty God is the reward and there is no greater reward.

The reward that Jesus speaks about here in this sermon is that the acts of righteousness are no longer a burden, are no longer a show that we must put on, are no longer hoops that we must jump through, but they are a labour of love.

They are things that bless and feed us as we seek to love and serve our Holy God. If you want to be genuine in your acts of righteousness, genuine in your life as a Christian, you must live for the audience of one.

[ 17 : 55 ] You must close your eyes to the pressure and distraction of the people around you and check your heart. Why am I doing this? Secondly, how can you make sure you're genuine?

Let your reputation overflow from your character. Let what is outside be the result of what is inside. If people look at you and ask questions about your commitment to God, ask questions about your obedience, the answer is not to convince those people that you're actually committed and you're actually obedient.

And that's good news. That's actually a weight lifted. You don't have to put on a show. Instead, Jesus calls you to focus on what's inside, to focus on your heart, to focus on a love for Him. That is good news because no matter how hard you try, you will never be good enough to convince even the people around you, let alone God, if your heart is not in love with Him.

Jesus says, let your public worship, let the person that you are when people are around be the overflow of your private worship. Let the person that you are when other Christian brothers and sisters see you in your community group here at church, even when you're out shopping or spending time with family, let that person be who you are in private, overflowing.

[ 19 : 20 ] Let the way that you read God's word by yourself be the way that you read God's word here at church. Work on the inside and the outside will follow because what is on the inside always comes out.

Let your heart drive your hands and feet. There is an oppressive version of following Jesus. It's the version where you get told everything that you are doing wrong and try and fix it all.

You get told that you're not encouraging enough and so you spend the next week trying really hard to be encouraging. You get told that you're not praying enough so you put in a disciplined regime of prayer where you get up at 6am every day to pray for an hour.

You get told that you're not serving enough so you fill every waking moment with service. That is an oppressive version of following Jesus where you just get burden after burden. But Jesus is saying here in his Sermon on the Mount what he is calling us to is to love him.

And then that love will overflow in service. It will overflow in prayer. Not so that people see but because there is no greater joy than talking to the God who loved us enough to send his son to die for us.

[ 20 : 32 ] It is the love for him that overflows in generosity because we have been shown generosity. Following Jesus is between you and him.

The opinion of nobody else matters when it comes to you standing before God in that final day. And so even when no one is watching especially when no one is watching Jesus is still there right by your side.

If you wish to live a life of genuine devotion to God the instruction in this passage is let your reputation overflow from your character.

Work on the inside. Work on your love for him when no one else is watching and that will shape the person that you are when people are watching. But there is a bit of a tension here.

If you remember last week we read in verse 16 of chapter 5 let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. So just one chapter ago we are told to be public and obvious in our love for Jesus so that God gets glory.

[ 21 : 47 ] Now we have been told to give privately pray privately and fast subtly. How do we hold those two things together? Again another really helpful quote that I have read during this week.

Basically show when you are tempted to hide and hide when you are tempted to show. The issue isn't whether or not you pray in public or private. The issue isn't whether people know whether you give or what you are giving or not giving.

The issue isn't whether people are aware that you are fasting or not fasting. The issue is your heart. The issue is the motivation. If you are tempted to be private because you don't want people to know that you are following Jesus then the message of chapter 5 is let your light shine.

If you are tempted to show everybody so that they think you are impressive and holy then the message is go into your room shut the door and do it before your heavenly father alone.

Before the audience of one. If you want to be genuine close your eyes to the people around you and live for your heavenly father alone.

[ 22 : 56 ] He is not asking for mere actions or words. He demands your heart and nothing less. Reputation is just what people think of you but if you want to be real with God then what matters is your character.

What matters is the person that you are when nobody's looking because what's on the inside will always come out. Let me pray for us.

Father God we want to acknowledge that it is so easy to take good things that you have given us and then use them as a means of self-promotion. We want to confess that we do feel the pressure of being good or being better when we're around people.

We do feel the pressure of living up to the expectations of others but God thank you for reminding us that you are the only one who matters. thank you for loving us even when we didn't deserve it. Thank you that how much we pray or give or fast in no way affects your willingness to love and forgive us. God lift the burden of trying to be good enough from our shoulders and replace it with the joy of loving you because you first loved us.

[ 24 : 21 ] Father help us to be people who feel safe to be honest when we're struggling to share our failures so that together we might grow in our love for you.

Father please shape us in the quiet times in our alone times to be so consumed with passion for you so overwhelmed with love for you that it overflows into the people we are in public.

Thank you for your spirit that has begun and will complete this work in us. In Jesus' name Amen.