

A Double Life?

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[0 : 00] As we turn to God's word together, let's pray for a moment. Father, we're so thankful that we can have your word open before us just now.

And we pray that as we study your word that we will be open before you, that by your spirit working in us, you will teach us your word, that you'd lead us in your ways and make us more and more into the people you want us to be.

In Jesus' name, amen. This morning we're going to continue our study in the Gospel of Matthew. For any of you who haven't been coming along to St. Columbus over the past couple of months, we've been working our way through this Gospel.

And today we're continuing on that study. But don't worry if you've missed any of the previous sermons, you should be able to follow everything that we're hoping to say. Today we've come to the passage that Ali read for us.

We can read again verse one of Matthew chapter six. Jesus said, Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

[1 : 12] In so many ways in our lives, we can be worried about what other people see and think. I remember about four years ago, I was back home in the Isle of Lewis, and I went to watch a football match.

The football pitch was just a few hundred yards from our house, and as many people in the village did, we would go up and watch the football of a summer's evening. And I took a football with me because the kids often liked to play at the side of the pitch.

After the match I was going home, and I was just dribbling the football along the pavement as I made my way back to the house. I was very home, and for some reason I don't know how, I put my foot on the ball and in a moment I was flat on the ground.

I don't know what I did, but I went from standing up to on the ground in a split second. I actually hurt my shoulder quite badly, and four years later my shoulder is still a little bit sore.

But at that moment, when that happened, my first thought wasn't, what have I done to my shoulder? My first thought wasn't, have I broken any bones in my body?

[2 : 17] My first thought was, did anyone see me? And that kind of thing applies in so many areas of life, at work, at school, in our community, and it applies in our lives as disciples.

And that's what Jesus is wanting us to think about in this passage. In the previous chapter, chapter 5, Jesus has already given us some brilliant teaching about how we are to live our lives as His disciples.

He's spoken about our character, He's spoken about how we should bear witness to the world around us, He's spoken to us about how we should view God's law, and He's taught us about how we should react to situations, especially when people treat us badly.

In all these areas, we must always remember that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus isn't telling us how to become disciples, He's telling us how we should live as disciples.

And the great theme that He emphasises again and again is that as disciples, we are to be different. Jesus wants us to live in a way that stands out from all the brokenness and selfishness and hostility in the world around us.

[3 : 29] We are to be different in a really good way. Coming into chapter 6, Jesus continues this teaching for us, and he moves on to another key aspect of our lives as Christians, our devotional life.

He mentions three areas, giving, praying and fasting. And all three of these are immensely important. Giving is at the heart of discipleship. The whole reason that we're disciples is because of

everything that God gives to us in His grace.

And every day from the air we breathe to the clothes we wear to the food we eat, we are constantly dependent on God's generosity. So as disciples, we too gladly, willingly give in order to support the work of God's kingdom and to help people around us in need.

Prayer is also absolutely vital. It's the key means by which we grow in our relationship with God alongside reading our Bibles. Prayer is that wonderful privilege where we can talk to God, we can praise Him, and we can pour our hearts out to Him.

It's an absolutely amazing thing for us to be able to do. And thirdly, fasting. And that is also brilliant. It's maybe something that we don't do that often, but it's actually an incredibly good thing to do, and it's actually a very big part of the church tradition in Scotland.

[4 : 53] It's a wonderful way of focusing our minds on a particular issue, it's a very powerful expression of the fact that we're taking our devotional life seriously.

As disciples, we should all be giving, praying and fasting, and these verses give us brilliant teaching for all of these areas.

If we had time, I'd love to look at these in more detail, but today what I want us to do is focus a wee bit more broadly on this whole passage and to think about the fact that for all of these areas of devotion, Jesus is reminding us that it's very easy to do things in the wrong way and for the wrong reasons.

As he says, beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, for then you'll have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Jesus is saying, don't do this stuff just to be seen by other people.

And he gives examples of how easy it is to do that in each of these three areas. So that's what I want us to think about today. We're going to do so under two headings. Heading number one is hypocrites, heading number two is disciples, and under each of these we're going to pick out some key words.

[6 : 12] So starting off, we'll ask the question, what's the opposite of a disciple? And our instinctive answer might well be, well, an unbeliever.

And in many ways that's true. That's ultimately the key distinction, the only distinction that really matters to humanity, whether you're united to Jesus by faith or not, whether you're with Him or against Him, whether you're on the path to eternal life or on a path to eternal death.

But for us as Christians, for us in our lives as disciples, in terms of how we live, the focus of this passage is a little bit more narrow. And what's been said before us here is that the opposite of being a disciple is being a hypocrite.

Jesus makes that very clear for each of these areas of devotion, he repeatedly says, do not be like the hypocrites. You can see it set out before you in the verses highlighted there.

As you may know, the word for hypocrite is literally the word for an actor, somebody who pretends to be someone else. Way back in the Greco-Roman world, this actually involved wearing a mask, so people would go on stage wearing some kind of mask over their face as they performed their role.

[7 : 35] And that's really a very vivid image of what hypocrisy is. We kind of put on this outward show that conceals who we really are, and it gives the impression that you're something else.

It's very easy to actually Google Greco-Roman stage masks, and you can see what they look like. In terms of our relationship with God, to be a hypocrite is to put on a kind of mask of devotion and piety so that you make a good outward impression.

Jesus gives us three examples. The first is sounding a trumpet when you give to help those in need. The second is standing in a synagogue or on a street corner to pray.

The third is to disfigure your face while you fast. All these are done to draw attention to yourself so that other people will be impressed.

And Jesus is making it absolutely clear that that is not the kind of devotion that he is looking for. And if you read all the way through to chapter 23 of Matthew, in that chapter Jesus gives an even more scathing rebuke of this kind of hypocrisy.

[8 : 52] And the important thing to remember is that that would have been absolutely astonishing for the people who were listening to Jesus because the people who were sounding trumpets when they gave and who were standing on the street corners to pray and who disfigured their faces while they were fasting, they looked like the most devoted of all the religious people.

And if you were to ask just a normal person in the street, who's the most devoted religious person you know, you'd say, well, it's that guy who's sounding the trumpet or that guy on the street corner or that person who's clearly fasting all the time.

They looked so impressive and yet Jesus says their hypocrites do not be like them.

That kind of outward show is not the way Jesus wants to express our devotion. Now, whenever we talk about this, I think for all of us this is something that we've probably seen in other people and hypocrisy is a very easy thing to spot in others.

But when I read this, I have to acknowledge that this is a trap that I often fall into as well. And maybe that's the hypocrisy that's a bit harder to see, but I look at my life and I have to acknowledge it's there.

[10:17] Behind this hypocrisy, there are two key words that I want us just to think about which help explain why Jesus is so concerned that this is something that we don't do.

The first key word is inconsistency. You can see it there. That's really what hypocrisy is. It's an inconsistency whereby we say one thing, we do another.

We act one way in certain situations and then completely differently in others. We put on an outward show that's not really consistent with who we really are. And the crucial point I want to recognize is that inconsistency is the absolute opposite of all that God is.

If you were to ask the question, how do we define God? We're probably asking the most profound question that we could ever consider. To define God is just a mind-blowing topic.

But one of the amazing things about the Bible is that even though this is possibly the most complicated question we could ever ask, how do you define God? The Bible actually answers that with an incredibly simple and beautiful statement.

[11:33] The Bible sums up the definition of God with two tiny words. I am.

And the foundation of all of our theology is grounded on the fact that God is who he is. In fact, that's actually the foundation of all reality.

It speaks to the fact that God is there, that he is eternal, that he is true, and that he is absolutely consistent.

At every moment in eternity, at every moment in history, at every moment in dealing with humanity, God is who he is. He's utterly consistent. He's unchanging.

He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. He never lies. He never deceives. Never says one thing and does another. He never pretends. He's never inconsistent.

[12:30] In other words, God is never a hypocrite. And that's why it's no wonder Jesus says, don't do that, because to be an inconsistent hypocrite is to be the very opposite of what God is like.

And the whole goal of being a disciple in Jesus' kingdom is to be part of a new humanity that's being restored to bear the image of God. As Jesus says at the end of chapter 5, we're to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

And so God is the ultimate non-hypocrite. He's never inconsistent. And as disciples, we are to be like Him.

The second keyword is insecurity. If we ask the question, why are these people outwardly displaying their religious devotion?

We might say, well, they're arrogant. They're show-offs. They're proud. They love their own status. And that's probably true.

[13:42] But I think that ultimately the reason why these religious leaders were putting on this kind of outward show was because they were insecure.

And exactly the same as true in all areas of life. People show off. People try to put on a good impression. People put a huge effort into their outward appearance, whether it's by talking about their job and their salary, or whether it's making sure that we have the right kind of clothes or the right car, or making sure that our Facebook or Instagram page is really impressive.

Why do we do all these things? Is it because we're confident, strong, and self-assured? No.

I think it's almost always because we're insecure. It's a great reminder that the mask of hypocrisy, ultimately, it's not a public display.

It's a public hiding. And of course, the Bible tells us why that's the case. The insecurity that makes us want to publicly hide is a direct symptom of the effect that sin has had on the world.

[14:56] If you go back to Genesis 3, you'll see that the first action of humanity after the fall was an act of insecurity. Adam and Eve covered themselves and hid.

And for so many of us today, we feel a huge pressure to put on a kind of public face that will give a good impression. And the result is that we end up living a kind of double life.

We have the double life of who we are at work compared with who we really are. We have the double life of who we are on social media compared with who we really are. And we can even have the double life of who we are at church compared with who we really are.

We feel a massive pressure to have this outward mask that will make other people think that we're okay. And the whole thing is utterly exhausting.

And the whole thing is utterly unnecessary. Because if inconsistency is un-Godlike and if insecurity is a result of the fall, then that tells us that what God wants for you is the exact opposite of both of these things.

[16:16] In other words, Jesus does not want us to be inconsistent and Jesus does not want us to be insecure. He wants something different and better for his disciples.

And so that's our second heading. We're going to think about what Jesus wants for disciples. Again, there's two key words I want us to highlight here to kind of match the first tree that we've looked at. Early we asked the question, what's the opposite of a disciple? And we said that in many ways in this passage, the answer is a hypocrite. So if we ask the question, what's the opposite of inconsistent hypocrisy, the answer is integrity.

And that's reminding us that at the very heart of being disciples is the fact that Jesus wants us all to be men and women of integrity. In other words, we're to be consistent. We are to be integrated in the sense that what we are in private, we are in public.

What we are to one person, we are to all. What we are before people, we are before God. And Jesus brings this out very clearly by drawing a contrast between the public place and the secret place.

[17:36] In all of these acts of hypocritical devotion, the action is being undertaken in a public way. They're done in order to be seen by others. You can see that phrase appears again and again through this passage.

Jesus is saying that really these acts of devotion are not meant to be public displays. Generally they're meant to be done in secret. He says, don't broadcast what you give.

Don't make a show of prayer. Don't tell the world that you're fasting. Instead, keep it secret. That doesn't mean that it's wrong to pray in front of other people. There are many other examples in the Bible of people praying together.

The key point that Jesus is making is that these acts of devotion should never ever be done as a public spectacle. That makes perfect sense because really none of these acts of devotion have got anything to do with other people.

Many aspects of Christian living are directed towards others, acts of mercy, of encouragement, of teaching, of love. They're all towards others. But giving, praying, and fasting are all acts of devotion that are ultimately directed towards God.

[19:00] That's why in terms of our devotional life, our concern should never be, what do other people think? It should always be, what does God think?

And one of the key things that God is looking for is consistent integrity. A relationship with God should be consistent. Of course, that's true of any relationship.

As a husband, a father, a colleague, a friend, it should never be the case that I'm one thing in public and another thing in private. If that's true of a relationship with others, it's most definitely true of our relationship with God, whether it's in public or whether it's in the secret place, God is looking for our consistent devotion.

And again, that makes perfect sense because whether we are in public or in secret, it makes absolutely no difference to God. One of the great truths that's been emphasized here is that God sees not just when we're in private, but when we are in secret.

He's able to see all the different things that we're doing. One of the great truths, one of the big theological terms that have been set before us here is the fact that God is omniscient, the fact that he sees all things.

[20:19] And that means that wherever we are, he's watching us. It's a bit like this live stream just now, you can see me, but if I was to walk across to the side, you wouldn't see me. If I was to go home, thankfully you still wouldn't see me.

But God's live stream is always on. And that's not to say he's spying on us. It's saying that we can't pretend to be something that we're not before him.

And all of that means that as disciples, who we are when no one is watching is who we really are. And that's why it's complete theological nonsense to think that I could come to church and be all nice and friendly and holy and then go home or go to work and be horrible.

We must never forget that being a disciple of Jesus is ultimately not something we do. It's something we are. And we are what we are, whether we're being watched by others or whether we're all alone.

[21 : 28] It's all a great reminder that we've got to be very careful about kind of religious showing off. It's something that can happen easily. It can happen in churches. It can happen online. It can happen in books. It can happen in Bible studies.

It can be so tempting to say and do things that we think will impress other people. Jesus is reminding us that the one person who isn't impressed by that is God.

I look at myself and so often I am far more concerned about what other people see in me. I pray that my biggest concern would always be for what God sees.

As disciples, we are to be men and women of integrity. But in saying all that, it's really easy to instantly feel very guilty.

And we hear what Jesus is teaching and we think, I really need to sort myself out and I need to try and get to the level that Jesus requires. It's very easy to come to a passage like Matthew 6 and think, Jesus is saying, stop doing this and start doing that.

[22 : 42] And I suppose at one level that's true because Jesus is directing us in very practical terms. But the key point is that this practical instruction is grounded on an incredibly profound reason.

Jesus isn't just saying, get up to standard and stop being hypocrites. He's actually saying, you don't need to be hypocrites because I have something far better for you.

That brings us to our final key word, security. If the reason that we are inconsistent hypocrites is because we are insecure, the reason we are to have integrity as disciples is because with our faith in Jesus, we are absolutely secure.

And that security is taught to us again and again and again in this passage through two amazing words that Jesus repeatedly says.

Which two words? Your Father. The God who sees in secret, the God to whom our devotion is given, the God who is utterly consistent is your Father if you are trusting in Jesus.

[24 : 09] And if you look at the passage, you can see that Jesus repeatedly says, your Father who sees in secret will reward you. You can see it for giving, praying and fasting.

Jesus repeats the same statement. Now when Jesus says that, I don't think he's giving an ultimatum which says, if you do this, then God will reward you.

I think Jesus is giving a promise. Just do it and God will see you and will reward you. And you absolutely do not need to try and impress him.

All of the inconsistency of hypocrisy arises from the feeling of being insecure, of feeling that we need to make a good impression, of feeling that we need to prove ourselves. Jesus is teaching us that if you are his disciple, then theologically, you are never, ever insecure.

Emotionally, we can often feel insecure. God himself knows that and Jesus can even relate to that himself. But no matter how insecure we may feel emotionally, Jesus is reminding us that spiritually and theologically, we are never, ever insecure.

[25 : 30] If we go back to think about God, again, we said that the foundational definition of God in the Bible is two words. I am. God is who he is.

That's like the definitive statement about the nature of God. It's repeated in several places in the Bible. Exodus 3, for example, is a big passage which speaks about that. But the Bible gives more details as to what that looks like.

It speaks about when we say God is who he is. There's lots of different attributes which God displays. He is powerful, holy, wise, just, true, merciful, loving.

In all of these things, God is utterly consistent. I put it all in that diagram for you. You can see it there. It's like God is who he is. He's all of these things. He's holy and powerful and wise, loving, true, merciful, just.

In all of these areas, God is utterly consistent. But the key question is where do you fit into that diagram?

[26 : 39] And it's easy to think that we're kind of down here. We're looking up at God and he's all of these incredible things and we are so far from that. And you think, you know, God is way up there and we need to tie and work our way up to him and somehow impress him with our devotion and somehow reach his standards.

Is that true? Is that where you are in this picture? Are you way down there and God is way up there? Where do you fit into this picture?

Well, the answer is that you're not down there. You are right here in your father's arms, held close by him as his precious, beloved child.

That means that all of this I am awesomeness of God is not the unachievable standard that you need to try and work your way up to. The I am awesomeness of God is the uncompromising, unbreakable, untouchable defense that keeps you safe in his arms forever.

That's why as disciples, we don't really actually stand kind of before God at a distance, trembling before his awesomeness.

[28 : 04] We actually hide behind all of his awesomeness in perfect peace, safety and security.

And what we are saying here in many ways is summing up the whole message of the Bible. We've been saying that in the Old Testament, God is revealed by these two profound words, I am.

That's really kind of the definitive Old Testament revelation of God. The New Testament brings something slightly different, something that's hinted at in the Old Testament, but that's brought out much more clearly in the New Testament.

In the Old Testament, the definitive revelation of God is in terms of I am. The New Testament, the definitive revelation of God is in terms of God as Father.

And so in the Old, I am in the New, Father. That's how God is revealed. The astonishing truth of the Gospel is that both of these are brought together.

[29 : 15] And at the centre of that is the cross of Jesus Christ where he died and rose again. And the whole purpose of that cross is so that God can put a year in the middle.

God is saying, I am your Father. And these four words should obliterate all of our insecurities.

These four words mean that the idea you have to put on an outward show to impress God or others is just crazy. These four words mean that you don't have to put on a performance.

You can close the door of your bedroom and offer your devotion to God because your Father sees you and he knows you and he will pour out his loving reward upon you in abundance.

These four words mean that you are accepted, secure, safe and utterly loved forever. And that's the difference that it makes if you put your trust in Jesus.

[30 : 31] But the reality of that security should also have a massive effect on how we function as a community of disciples. As we've been saying, hypocrisy comes from insecurity.

And that insecurity comes from the fact that we feel surrounded by people who are going to judge us or look down on us or shun us if they knew what we were like without our mask on.

The pressure to be a hypocrite comes from being in a community of fear and judgment. That's why we're scared about how we look or about what our salary is or about what car we drive because we fear that we're going to be judged.

The kingdom that Jesus is calling us into is not a community of fear and judgment. It's a community of grace. That's why if you look in verse 14, you see that Jesus gives an incredibly clear commandment that we are to forgive one another.

And that's one of the many reasons why following what Jesus teaches is so good for us. The hypocrite puts on a mask, terrified of judgment, of the judgment he's going to face from the community around him if they saw his failings.

[31 : 45] The disciple doesn't need a mask because even when our weaknesses and mistakes are seen, the only thing that the community around us should give us is forgiveness.

That means that as disciples we have security with God. He is our Father. And we have security with one another because we're a community of forgiveness and grace.

This is again where we see the incredible transformation that Jesus brings into our lives. And I guess all of that leaves us with the question, where is your security?

We are probably in the middle of some of the most uncertain, insecure days that any of us have ever known. It is such a strange time for us all to live through.

And in all of that, it's a huge instinct to hide. We want to hide from the coronavirus.

[33 : 00] We want to hide from everything that's going on. In many ways, in so many aspects of life, we just want to hide because we're scared of what's going on around us.

The amazing thing about God is that He sent His Son, Jesus, to die and rise again so that God can hold out His arms to you and say, just come and hide here and I'll keep you safe forever.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we are so thankful for all that Your Word teaches us.

And we pray that You forgive us for all the times we hide behind our achievements or our possessions or whatever it may be.

Instead of all that, we just want to hide with You, knowing that with You is where we're safe and secure forever. Thank You so much for all that You've done for us and for the amazing truth that You are our Father.

[34 : 22] Amen.