

Discipleship Unmasked

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Preacher: Thomas Davis

[0 : 00] And let's read God's Word together from Matthew 6, verses 1-4. In the New Testament, the first Gospel, Matthew 6, verses 1-4.

This is the Word of the Lord. 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.

Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others.

Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But 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. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.

This is God's Holy Word. Well, I want to say a huge thank you to Corey for the opportunity to be with you tonight. And thank you all so much for your warm welcome this evening.

[1 : 05] It is always just a massive joy to be with you here in Sincise. And it's a joy for two reasons. One, because, as Corey said, so many of you are such dear friends to me and my family.

And I love the opportunity to come and see people who we love so much. But it's also a joy because we live in a very small community in an area where our churches are small and struggling. And I love coming to the very middle of our capital city and seeing a full church with many new faces, with Jesus' name being praised and honoured right at the heart of Edinburgh.

So it's a joy for me to be here. And thank you so, so much for the opportunity and for the warm, warm welcome. We're going to look together at the words that Corey read from Matthew chapter 6. And you've been going through the Sermon on the Mount, which is such a wonderful passage of Scripture. And it's a section of the Bible that's so important for us as disciples.

[2 : 07] Because here, Jesus is teaching what God's kingdom, what life in God's kingdom should look like. And I think you've just gone through chapter 5. It's teaching you so much about what our character should be like as Christians.

It's guiding us about how we are to bear witness and be a light to the world that's around us. It's teaching us about how we should understand God's law, how the Old Testament fits into the new, how we should see our response to that in our lives.

And it teaches us about how we should react to situations, especially when other people teach us badly. And as I'm sure you've heard this many times, it is vital to remember that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is not teaching you how to become a disciple.

He is teaching you how to live as a disciple. In other words, this sermon is unpacking what being a disciple of Jesus should look like.

And these opening verses of chapter 6 are teaching us some more crucial lessons. And I want to think about them under the heading Discipleship Unmasked, which I hope will make sense as we go through.

[3 : 18] The great theme of this sermon is that disciples are to be different. Disciples of Jesus are to be different. And so at work, at school, in our communities, we are to stand out from the brokenness and the selfishness and the hostility and the cruelty that we see in the world around us.

As we follow Jesus, we are to be different in a beautiful way. But being different can be hard.

And one of the reasons why being different is so hard is because if you're anything like me, you are constantly plagued with pressure and anxiety about what other people think of you.

I want to share a story with you. I may have told this story before, so some of you might have heard it before. Back in Carlway, where I live, the house where we live in is close to the football pitch.

And there's a local football team that we love to go and watch. So a few years ago, I went to watch the football team. And I took a football with us because Tom was wee then and the other, John and

Annie were also small.

[4 : 37] So we took a football so they could play at the side while we watched the game. That was all fine. They went home early. And so I stayed on to watch the rest of the football match. And I still had the football. So I was taking the football home as I walked home like a quarter of a mile down the road.

And I was walking home carrying the football. I thought, well, actually, I'll just maybe just kind of dribble the ball along. I was kind of once played football a little bit. And so I walked along and I had the ball on the pavement, just going along like this with the ball.

And at some point, I don't actually know what happened. But I put my foot on top of the ball and in a second, I was on the ground.

I'm so convinced somebody shot me with something from somewhere. But anyway, I fell flat on the ground. I hurt my shoulder. My shoulder has never been right since. This is about eight years ago. And so I fell on the ground.

And so like that, I was in pain. Confused as to what had happened. But I immediately stood up, not thinking anything about my pain or about what had happened. The only thought in my mind was, did anybody see me?

[5 : 45] Thankfully, I don't think they did because not many people live in Carlyway. But that was the immediate thought that came to my mind. And we're often plagued by that. You know, what do other people think? To give you another example, imagine you were wearing your pajamas right now.

Would you feel comfortable? There's nothing uncomfortable about pajamas. They're actually very comfortable. So you could be sitting here. It would all be super comfortable.

Would you feel comfortable in your pajamas? Well, I would not feel comfortable in my pajamas entirely because of what other people would be thinking. In so many ways, this plagues us.

We worry about what people see and think. It applies in every area of life, in work, in school, in our community, in social media. And as Jesus highlights in these verses, that can have a huge influence on us as disciples.

And Jesus wants us to think about this. And so we're going to look at these verses together. And we're just going to go through three headings. We're going to think about contrasts, constants, and a question.

[6 : 52] And I'm delighted because all my headings begin with C. So, first of all, contrasts. Question I'd like to ask you.

What's the opposite of a disciple? And you might immediately think, well, an unbeliever. And in so many ways, that is true. And in many ways, that's the key and ultimate and only distinction that will matter on the day of judgment.

Whether you're united to Jesus by faith or not. Whether you are with him or against him. Whether you're on the path to eternal life or to eternal death.

And so, at one level, you're absolutely right if you thought opposite of a disciple is an unbeliever. But for us as Christians, and so for those of you who are Christians or if you become a Christian, if you start following Jesus, in terms of how we live as disciples, the focus is a little bit more narrow. In this passage. And I want to suggest that according to these verses, the opposite of being a disciple is being a hypocrite. And that's the key contrast that Jesus is drawing before us in these verses.

[8 : 06] And so, in verse 1, he's got that great warning. Beware of practicing your righteousness in front of other people in order to be seen by them. And then he goes on to give three examples in this little section and the first following.

He talks about giving. He talks about prayer. He talks about fasting. And in each of them, if you were to look down beyond verse 4, you'll see that Jesus says the same thing.

Don't be like the hypocrites. Now, you'll maybe know that the word for hypocrite in Greek, it is the word hypocrite. It's a Greek word.

And it's the word for an actor. And that's starting to help us to see and understand what we mean by this term. Because an actor is somebody who's pretending to be somebody else. And in the Greco-Roman world, stage acting actually very often involved putting on a stage mask.

And you can Google Greco-Roman stage masks and you'll see them for yourself. And that's just a very vivid image of what hypocrisy is. You're kind of putting on an outward appearance, an outward

mask that's hiding who you really are.

[9 : 18] And it's giving the impression that you're something else. And so in terms of our relationship with God, and in terms of our life as disciples, to be a hypocrite is to put on a mask of righteousness or anything else that is trying to give a good outward impression that will impress people.

And Jesus describes here, sounding a trumpet whilst you give money to those who are in need. In the next verses he'll talk about standing in the synagogue or on a street corner, making a really eloquent prayer in front of everyone.

And then he talks about disfiguring your face while you're fasting so that everyone can see that that's what you're doing. All of these are just drawing attention to yourself so that other people will be impressed. And Jesus makes it absolutely clear that is not the kind of discipleship that he's looking for.

And for the hearers of the Sermon on the Mount, this would have been astonishing for them. Because the people that Jesus is being critical of were the people who everybody would have thought they are the most religiously devoted people.

They are the experts in what it means to be spiritual. And they are at the level that the rest of us is trying desperately to match. And Jesus says, they're hypocrites.

[10 : 53] Don't be like them. That kind of outward show is not what Jesus wants us to live out in our discipleship.

And I think there are many people here who can probably think of examples of this. You've maybe seen it. And people who have grown up in the church, I'm sure, will have seen it. Where you'll have seen somebody in one context, and then you'll have seen them in another context.

And you're thinking, these don't match up. And it's something that people can find very off-putting and very disappointing when they see it in others in the church. But that's true.

We will have seen it in others. But I've got to acknowledge that it's a trap that I've fallen into as well. It's an incredibly easy trap to slip into because we're worried about what other people think.

All of this is coming back to some of the stuff that chapter 5 highlights. That as disciples, Jesus wants us to be men and women of integrity. That idea that our whole lives are integrated together, all of which are under the lordship of Christ.

[11 : 58] All of it is shaped by the gospel so that what we are in private, what we are in public, what we are to one person, we are to everybody.

Jesus wants our discipleship, in other words, to be unmasked. And Jesus brings that out very clearly by drawing another contrast between the secret place and the public place.

He does it in these verses. He does it in the verses that follow. Jesus is saying that these acts of righteousness, whether it's giving here, praying, fasting, they're actually things that should be done in secret.

Here he's saying, look, don't broadcast what you're giving. Instead, just keep it secret. Now in these words, Jesus is touching on two things that we care about a lot.

He's touching on our money and our reputation. And these are massively influential on us, both in the public place, among colleagues, friends, and also in the secret place of our hearts.

[13 : 06] I am quite sure that this week we won't even be able to help it. We will think and worry about our money and our reputation. In fact, these two things are very closely connected.

Today, our reputation is massively influenced by how much money we have and by what we do with it. So it's money that's going to give you the clothes or the phone or the car or the address or the watch that will make people think, wow, wow, they've made it.

They've done well. And our culture cannot break that connection between money and reputation.

So if you're minted, then you're admired. Now, often in instances, you get some very, very cultured movie references.

Now this was two years ago. It continues today. So you get great references to things like Lord of the Rings and all these kind of epic films. So my film taste operates at a different level to that.

So this, what I'm describing here, is illustrated magnificently in that outstanding epic movie, Dumb and Dumber.

[14 : 14] And that's my level of movie. Forget Tolkien. Dumb and Dumber. Awesome. Remember Dumb and Dumber? Two guys not that smart, hilarious, but they are taking this briefcase back to this girl that the guy likes.

And they have no idea until the briefcase gets opened by mistake that it's full of money. And so these guys who are kind of mocked and ridiculed, and everybody thinks they're just idiots, all of a sudden they're loaded.

And everyone thinks they're great. Because there's always just this massive connection between money and reputation. It's interesting that in biblical times, there is a fascinating kind of connection and a fascinating contrast, because money and reputation are connected in biblical times, but in a different way.

So today money and reputation are very much connected in terms of how much you have. In biblical times, it was more the case that your reputation was shaped by how much you gave. And so you can think back to the Old Testament, where a king that was just massively powerful and wealthy, they would demonstrate that wealth by giving lavishly to those who visited them.

[15:30] And so people who could give a lot, you know, were gaining a huge amount of reputation. There was the whole idea in that kind of culture of being like a benefactor and a sponsor of things in your community and things like that.

And here, in this example, the religious leaders are kind of doing a similar thing, making a big public spectacle of what they're giving. But whether it's the kind of flamboyant generosity of biblical times or the extravagant spending of today, the dynamic behind all this is actually the same.

It's all driven by the question, what do other people think of me? And as disciples, we want to swap that question for another one. Instead of asking, what does everyone else think?

We need to ask, what does God think? And as we contrast those two questions, which one matters more?

And so for all of us here, especially for those of you who are studying, especially those who are stepping into the workplace, and especially those who in a few years are going to be loaded, just let that question of what does God think?

[16:46] What does God want me to do? Let that always be the one that shapes you. So lots of contrasts for us to think about. There's also some constants that we want to draw out of this passage.

Jesus, as we said, is exposing the hypocrisy of the religious leaders around him. He's got no interest in this kind of lifestyle where we're kind of one thing here, another thing there. In certain situations, we'll act one way.

In others, we'll act differently. And all just for this outward show to impress people. Jesus has just got no interest in that. And I love the fact that Jesus has no interest in that. And I think one of the big reasons why Jesus has no interest in that is because that kind of hypocrisy is in total contrast to the constantness of God.

And that's the crucial point I want us to draw out here, that hypocrisy and that kind of inconsistency is the absolute opposite of all that God is.

If you ask the question, how do we define God? You're probably asking the most profound question that anyone could ever consider. Defining God is just like a mind-blowing topic.

[17:59] How would you define God? But the amazing thing is that even though that's possibly the most complicated question that we could ever ask, the Bible's answer to that question is incredibly and beautifully simple.

Because the Bible sums up the definition of God with two of the smallest words in the English language. The Bible defines God with the phrase, I am.

And that is actually the foundation of all our theology, all our understanding of God, that He is who He is. And that speaks of the fact that God is there, that He's eternal, that He's true, and that He is absolutely consistent.

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

[19:13] In other words, God is never, ever a hypocrite. Instead, in God, there is magnificent, majestic constancy.

Now, there are several big theological categories that lie behind this. Divine simplicity, the fact that in God, there is just thorough, undismantleable, unarrangeable, eternal simplicity.

He is God, forever constant. Divine immutability, God does not change. He's utterly stable, utterly consistent, utterly reliable. Divine omniscience, the fact that God knows all things, sees all things, understands all things.

Divine righteousness, the fact that God conforms to an impeccable standard, an impeccable moral standard, always maintaining what is right and true and good.

All of these massive theological categories are pressing home the magnificent stability and constancy of the God who is who He is. No wonder Jesus says, don't be a hypocrite.

[20 : 24] Because to be that is to be the opposite of what God is like. And a key part of all of this is that our growth in discipleship is the desire to become more like Jesus, to bear the image of our Creator more and more.

And as part of that, we want there to be a constant correspondence between our inward lives and our outward lives. That's what chapter 5 has been speaking about. That's what's been highlighted and emphasized again here.

And interestingly, again, that applies to God. when you see God, there is a beautiful correspondence between the inward and in some ways secret life of God that is bigger and more mind-blowing than we can take in.

There is a perfect correspondence and integration between the inward life and being of God and His outward acts. Now, this is why it's so important that our theology, these big categories of theology, need to become the lens through which we look at our lives and we look at the lives of everything around us as disciples.

So, the constant unchanging truth about God needs to be the constant lens through which we, as followers of Jesus, look at everything in our lives.

[21 : 52] because if our theology is buried in the back of our minds, then we could easily fall into the trap of thinking, well, I can kind of be one thing at church and I can be another thing at work and I can be another thing at home and I don't really need to think too much about how the Sermon on the Mount and the other ethical instructions of the New Testament affect me because, well, you've just got to kind of, you know, got to do what's best for me and I've got to do what works.

And so, when theology is in the back of your mind, you can fall into these traps. When your theology becomes the lens through which you look at life, the minute that you pull these great theological truths about the constantness of God into your thinking, our hypocrisy becomes exposed and the gospel does what it always does.

It blows up our nonsense, transforms our perspective and places us on a much, much better intellectual and ethical foundation.

In other words, what am I saying? Well, it's just basically the fact that your theology tells you that God sees everything and cares about everything, whether it is in secret or in public, at church, at work, at home.

As we said, God is omniscient. He sees and knows everything and what we do, whether it's in public or in secret, it makes no difference to God. He's always watching us.

[23 : 24] And it's a great reminder that in terms of being disciples of Jesus, it's reminding us that actually who we are when no one's watching is who we really are.

And that's why, you know, that's why it's complete theological nonsense and it's like, I don't know if it's a good phrase to use, it's like evangelistic self-destruction when Christians live out their lives where we kind of come to church and we're one thing and then we go to work and we're horrible and difficult and selfish and arrogant and whatever.

It's so, so damaging because that masked discipleship that maybe you have encountered in your lives, that masked discipleship is theologically absurd and it's really, really damaging because people can see through it so easily.

And so, you know, it's again like Jesus, you know, he's so wise because I've seen so many times people who have been put off because, they've been put off the gospel because they've seen that. They've been hurt, treated badly. They've seen Christians behave in a way that they're like, I can't, I don't understand that. And it's so damaging and then you go to the New Testament and Jesus is like, don't be a hypocrite because he knows the damage it can cause.

[24 : 53] There's two warnings here that arise. The first is that we need to be very careful about financial showing off and so that's kind of part of what this is touching and that's just a, that's just a wise and important lesson.

Some of you may, may well, already or may go on to be blessed to do very, very well in your lives, you know, and praise God if you do, that gives you opportunities to do wonderful things for the gospel but, you know, we don't want to, you don't want to sort of show that off.

Yeah, you just don't, you don't want to do that. but even more importantly, what this is really pressing home to us is that we have to be on guard against religious showing off and that can happen so easily.

It can happen in church, it can happen online, it can happen in books, it can happen in Bible studies, it's so easy in a kind of church setting to want to say and do things that you think are going to impress other people.

And there's a massive social media world of Christian, religious, desperately trying to impress people, ism.

[26 : 16] the one person who is never impressed is Jesus. And, I mean, I guess I feel a bit embarrassed saying this but, you know, I'm sitting this week writing this sermon thinking, I really hope it's a good sermon in St. C's.

And then I read, Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them. So we're all battling this, we're all battling this because, you know, Jesus gives us such wise and helpful warnings and I want my prayer and your prayer to be that our biggest concern is always be, what does God constantly see?

We spend a lot of time thinking, who's watching us? You're not wrong, you're not wrong to think about the fact that someone is watching you. The problem is that we pick the wrong someone to worry about.

So, this passage exposes contrasts, it teaches us about some constants, final C, question. So, the Sermon on the Mount presents us with a lot of direct, challenging, practical instructions.

That's one of the things that's beautiful about it, it's just, it's quite, Jesus is quite hard-hitting in it, which is actually helpful. And because of that, we can often think that the Sermon on the Mount is hitting us with the question, will you do this?

[27 : 41] So, will you turn the other cheek? Will you guard your hearts against lust and anger? Will you pray for those who persecute you? Will you go the extra mile?

And those will you do this questions are good, they are helpful, they're important, ask them. But as we come into chapter 6, Jesus is not so much asking you the will you do this question, in fact, he just assumes that you'll do these things, because he says, when you give, and he'll go on to say, when you pray, and when you fast, he's not even, he's just assuming that we do it, because these are core things that we should be doing.

So he's not really asking the will you do this question, he's asking the why are you doing this question. And so if we ask the question, why were these people putting on this outward show of religious devotion, why were they doing that?

And so we might say, well, they were arrogant, they were show offs, they were proud, they loved their own status, they were selfish. And that's probably true, to a greater or lesser degree.

But I think that the biggest reason why they were doing all these things is because they were insecure. And exactly the same is true in all areas of life.

[29 : 02] People show off, people try to put on a good impression, people make a huge effort for their outward appearance to look good, whether that's by talking about your salary or your job or your grades or making sure you've got the right clothes, car, watch, whatever, whether it's your social media page, it has to look all picture perfect, or whatever it is.

Why do we do these things? Is it because we're confident and strong and self-assured? No, I think it is almost always because we are insecure and scared.

And that's where we discover that you can actually get two kinds of hypocrisy. You can get arrogant hypocrisy. So somebody who just, you know, somebody who does not care about integrity, quite happy with inconsistency in their lives, and is only interested in serving themselves.

And you do get that from time to time, and maybe there's occasions in life when we've slipped into that trap. You get that kind of arrogant hypocrisy sometimes. I think far more common is the second kind of hypocrisy, anxious hypocrisy.

And that's the trap that I fall into, and that I have to battle against. Because when I've been a hypocrite, it's not usually because I'm just a kind of uncontrollable, arrogant idiot.

[30 : 26] More often than not, it's because I'm nervous. Or scared. And that's why I'll do one thing in one context, and another thing in another context.

And that's why I'll maybe hide. So when I was an engineer, you may be like, oh, you're reluctant to talk about the fact that you were at church, or at school. At times I was reluctant to tell people and speak about the fact that I was a Christian.

Why did I do that? I didn't do that because I was arrogant. I was arrogant in different ways. But that wasn't, I did that because I was scared. And so being anxious can make you a hypocrite.

And it's a great reminder that the mask of hypocrisy is not actually a public display. It's a public hiding.

thing. And of course, the Bible explains why that's the case. It's one of the massive consequences of the fall. Sin makes us want to hide because it makes us feel ashamed.

[31 : 34] You see that in Adam and Eve? I see it in my own heart. And so many of us today, as you go into tomorrow, this new week, you're in this pressure. pressure.

Pressure to put on a public face to make a good impression. And the result is that you can live a double life. And so you can have the double life of, you know, who we are at work compared to who we really are.

The double life of who we are on social media compared to who we really are. And we can have the double life of who we are at church compared with who we really are. This weekend, I had the amazing privilege of being at the youth conference, the pre-church youth conference.

There was 200 people there on Saturday. It was amazing. So good to see. But I know that for some of the people who are at that conference, they are struggling with a double life.

Because there's pressure on them to conform to what their friends are doing and everything. They are being pulled in two directions. And we do that because we're scared.

[32 : 36] We put massive pressure on ourselves to put on this outward mask in order to make it look like we're okay. The whole thing is utterly exhausting. And the last thing I want to press home to you is that the whole thing is utterly unnecessary.

We struggle with hypocrisy because we struggle with insecurity. And the magnificent thing about the gospel is that grace addresses both.

So there's been times when I've been a hypocrite because I'm almost always anxious and insecure and grace deals with both.

So grace deals with your hypocrisy. So if you can sit here right now and if I have guilt-tipped you for the last 34 minutes where you're thinking, as a Christian, I have been living a double life and I have failed to kind of be who I really am in front of my friends or my colleagues and I have not lived out the Sermon on the Mount and I can see that sin and I feel so guilty about that sin and I am so annoyed with myself.

Do you know what grace is saying to you? Grace is saying that is forgiven. Your hypocrisy is washed away with all your other sins by the blood of Jesus.

[33 : 55] Grace deals without hypocrisy but grace also deals without insecurity. Because God in the gospel wants to pour reassurance into your heart that you are His.

So we are talking about discipleship unmasked. So I'm sure all of us here feel like we kind of have a little bit of a mask on us as disciples. And you know, we can say that because we're like, well, we don't really want anybody to see what's really in us and what we're really like.

So if you imagine that you really were unmasked before us tonight as a disciple, you're a follower of Jesus and you are absolutely unmasked, what would we see?

And you might be thinking you'd be seeing the biggest failure out there. And you'd be seeing somebody who doesn't have anything like the Bible knowledge they should have.

And who was like, actually barely even made it out of church tonight because I was feeling too tired. And you think, oh, you'll see all these. So you think, that's what's getting exposed. If you are unmasked tonight, what would you actually see?

[35 : 20] What would you actually find? You would find the beloved child of God. You'd find the bride of Christ.

You'd find the eternally redeemed. Bought with the blood of Christ. You'd find someone whom God has loved forever.

Do you need a mask? Of course you don't. And that's why as we follow Jesus, we want to just live out the life that he has blessed us with.

And for this beautiful gospel to shape all that we do. And the result is an amazing reward. And I didn't have time to talk about this. And I've already gone on for too long.

And those of you who were here when I was here will have thought, well, that's just normal. But there is just this talk of a reward. And the beautiful thing is that in our hypocrisy we're looking for that kind of instant reward of people approving of us and being impressed with us.

[36 : 35] And it fades so quickly. And God is saying, and Jesus is saying in these words, Luke, that the gospel is giving us an eternal reward. And that's asking you the question, can you be content with an eternal reward?

And you know, my hypocrisy isn't content with that. Because I want the instant reward. But if I focus on that and on what all that God has promised us, my need for a mask of hypocrisy disappears. And as an unmasked disciple, I can bask in the beauty and the fullness of everything that Jesus wants to give me and that he wants to give you.

So as we go on together, let's go on as disciples unmasked. Amen. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you so, so much for your amazing wisdom in seeing through the reality of hypocrisy. but as we also see in these words, we thank you for the way in which the gospel deals with our hypocrisy. And we're sorry for the times when we have felt the need to put on a mask and try to put on an impression to others.

[38 : 01] Thank you that the gospel deals with all of that. And so for everyone here, may they know anew just the cleansing, healing, renewing, wonderful power of the gospel in their lives and may their hearts be filled with the security and the peace and the hope of knowing that we have been loved by you and will be loved by you forever.

We pray that everybody here would see and understand that more and more. Amen.