

The Sermon on the Mount
The Deadly Danger of Hypocrisy
Matthew 6:1

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A number of years ago now, there was an article in the New York Times by Mark Landler. And in that article, this is what he wrote: “Every day an estimated ninety thousand people travel by train or bus from Hong Kong across the border to China. And there they head straight for Lo Wu Commercial City, a giant shopping mall devoted almost entirely to imitation luxury goods.” The writer goes on to say: “On a recent Sunday, crowds surged through the mall’s maze of corridors, mobbing hundreds of tiny stores all selling fake Rolex watches, Gucci shoes, Fendi clothing, Prada bags and Chanel wallets. While women rummaged through piles of merchandise, their husbands loitered outside, knee-deep in shopping bags. As shoppers elbowed one another aside for coveted items, scuffles broke out. (Sounds like Black Friday, doesn’t it?) With five floors and 500,000 square feet of retail space, Lo Wu may be the world capital of counterfeit goods.” It’s really quite a world, isn’t it? I mean, think about that for a moment - almost a hundred thousand people a day going to this massive shopping mall to buy counterfeit goods. We live in a world where people will buy what they know to be counterfeit as long as it looks enough like the real thing to fool their friends, to fool the people around them.

As I thought about that, I thought, that really, that’s a parable of what can often happen in Christianity. It is too common for Christians to be tempted to settle for counterfeit character and fake spirituality. Today we come to Matthew 6 where Jesus deals with this deadly danger. As I said, we also begin a new section of the sermon, so let me remind you of the structure of the Sermon on the Mount. It begins in chapter 5:3-16 with Jesus identifying the citizens of His spiritual kingdom. He starts with their character described in the beatitudes and then He tells us what their influence is like; they are salt and light. From there, He moves to the body of the sermon – Matthew 5:17 through 7:12 --and I’ve called that the righteousness of the kingdom. Here’s how the citizens of Jesus’ spiritual kingdom actually live. He describes their relationship to the Scripture at the end of chapter 5 that we’ve studied together, their relationship to God in chapter 6, and their relationship to others in chapter 7:1-12. The sermon finishes with Jesus identifying the dangers of the kingdom. One of those dangers is getting to the wrong entrance, the wrong gate, the wrong path, that doesn’t lead to life but to death. A second danger has to do with false teachers, and a third danger false profession. That’s the path we’re on to track through this great sermon.

As I've pointed out, the body of this message is bracketed by one expression. In 5:17 and in 7:12, you have the expression "according to the Law and the Prophets." That's an expression summarizing the entire Old Testament, the Scripture as it existed at that time. So Jesus, then, on the Sermon on the Mount is really focusing on the Old Testament Scripture. It is in a very real sense Jesus' exegesis of the heart of the Old Testament. So how does chapter 6 fit into the flow of Jesus' argument? Well, remember in chapter 5, Jesus established that His true disciples are characterized by genuine righteousness, by a heartfelt obedience to the true meaning of the Scripture. And He contrasts true righteousness against what the Pharisees were teaching. You remember in chapter 5, it was all about their flawed teaching of the Old Testament. In chapters 6 and 7, Jesus is going to contrast His true disciples' righteousness not with the Pharisees' teaching but with their practice, with their behavior. And so what exactly is the behavior? What is the righteousness of His true followers? Well, remember how Jesus summarized God's demands of us? The Old Testament Scripture? He summarized it as love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. And so Matthew 6 deals with the exclusive love we owe to God. Matthew 7:1-12 deals with the love we owe to others. So Matthew 6, then, is about loving God more than anything else, and it's really divided (chapter 6 is) into two sections. In the first section, verses 1-18, we're going to discover that loving God means pursuing His glory rather than our own glory. In the second half of chapter 6, beginning in verse 19 through the end of the chapter, we're going to understand that loving God means pursuing the advancement of His kingdom, rather than the advancement of our own.

Now I want us to begin today with the first section of chapter 6 and this idea that loving God – if we're going to love God, if we're going to have a right relationship to God--it means pursuing His glory rather than our own. Now again, because we're going to be for a number of weeks in these eighteen verses, because buried in the middle of it is the Lord's Prayer, let me give you an outline, the basic structure of Matthew 6:1-18. Verse 1 is the general principle. Verses 2 through 18 are three specific examples of that general principle. Notice verse 2 begins: "When you give..." There's the first example. Verse 5 begins: "When you pray..." There's the second example, and Jesus interrupts the second example for an extended discussion of the issue of prayer. Verse 15 begins: "When you fast..." Those are the three specific examples.

Today I want us just to examine the general principle which occurs in verse 1. Let's look at it together. Just one verse will occupy our thoughts today. Matthew 6:1. "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." That is a summary. That is the general principle that sets up the examples that summarize verses 1-18. So it introduces us to the deadly danger of hypocrisy. In all three of the examples Jesus will give, He contrasts what He expects from us as His disciples, with the motives of a group that He calls the hypocrites. Notice this. Look in verse 2: when you give to the poor, don't give as the hypocrites do. Verse 5: when you pray, don't pray like the

hypocrites pray. Verse 16: when you fast, don't fast like the hypocrites do. Jesus says beware the deadly danger of hypocrisy.

Now as we delve our way into this verse a little deeper, I want us to start where Jesus starts. Let's begin by looking at the danger of hypocrisy. Notice verse 1 again. He begins with a command: Beware, beware. By the way, I should tell you that verse 1 in the Greek text, the verb and the pronouns are all plural. Jesus is talking now to all of His disciples as a group. He's saying, 'All of you who claim to be My disciples, listen up.' The Greek word *beware* literally means to turn one's mind to, to be in a state of alert, to be concerned about something. It implies an imminent danger. There is something that could imperil you in some way. And secondly, it implies a degree of stealth, of subtlety. Jesus is saying, Listen. Listen up. There is a danger that's always nearby, and yet, even though it's always nearby, it can sneak up on you and surprise you. Beware. Now what exactly is the danger Jesus is warning us about? "Beware (*He says*) of practicing your righteousness before men..." Now what does He mean by practicing your righteousness? The Greek actually says: "Beware of doing your righteousness..." What does that mean? Jesus is referring to all acts of righteousness, all righteous acts, all acts of obedience to Scripture. He's only going to give three examples, but His warning isn't restricted to those three examples. Jesus isn't just talking about when you give and when you pray and when you fast. Listen carefully. Anything you do as an act of obedience to the Scripture can be done before men to be noticed by them. I want you to think for a moment about the spiritual activities which characterize your life. There are a lot of them that we could list. Let me just give you some larger representative examples. Think about Bible study for a moment, or prayer, or gathering for the corporate worship of the church as you've done this morning, or serving people, or using your giftedness in the life of the church, or giving, or singing, or any spiritual activity at all. Jesus says beware of the danger of doing those things in hypocrisy, because hypocrisy is deadly. How is it deadly? I think Peter gives us a hint in 1 Peter 2:1. He says:

Therefore, laying aside (*and he lists several different sins including hypocrisy; he says therefore, laying aside*)...hypocrisy...like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

Peter's point is that hypocrisy undermines our spiritual growth and development. If you want to grow in your understanding of Scripture; if you want to grow in salvation; if you want to spiritually mature and get beyond being a spiritual baby, beware of hypocrisy, because it will keep your growth stunted. It's a deadly danger to our spiritual lives. Jesus says beware. But Jesus doesn't merely warn us of danger. He goes on to tell us how to recognize the danger. In verse 1, He describes, secondly, the nature of hypocrisy. And specifically, He starts with a definition of hypocrisy: "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them..." Jesus says be on your guard against doing legitimate spiritual activities before men.

Now if you are a careful thinker and Bible student, and I hope you are, that verse should trouble you a little bit because it should immediately bring up a question. Wait a minute. Is Jesus contradicting what He's just told us back in chapter 5? Go back to 5:16. Here He says: "Let your light shine (*He's talking about your character described in the beatitudes, the new heart you've been given; let your light shine*) before men (*and let it shine*) in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Wait a minute. Here He says let your light shine before men, and we've just read don't do your acts of righteousness before men. Isn't He contradicting Himself? No, notice the significant and crucial difference between what Jesus commands in 5:16 and what He forbids in 6:1. Notice 5:16 again: "before men... to glorify your Father..." Now go to 6:1. "before men to be noticed by them..." You see the difference? In chapter 5, Jesus commands us to let our light shine before men, and He does so to confront a sinful tendency we have to fear and cowardice, to hide the change He's wrought in us. But here in chapter 6, He commands us to beware of practicing our righteousness before men to confront the opposite tendency, which is to give ourselves over to spiritual pride and vanity. Now be clear here. Jesus is not saying there should be no public acts of righteousness. We know that's true. For example, He's not saying there should be no public prayer. Jesus prayed publicly. His apostles prayed publicly. In 1 Timothy, we're commanded to pray publicly together as a church. So He's not forbidding public acts of righteousness. The real danger of hypocrisy is not the doing of your righteousness before men. The real danger of hypocrisy is doing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them. That's the issue. The issue is not who sees you. The issue is: whom do you want to see you. That's the issue. A.B. Bruce was right when he wrote this: "We are to show our acts of righteousness when we're tempted to hide them and we're to hide them when we're tempted to show them." Now look at the word *to be noticed*. There's one Greek word that that's translated from and it means to gaze upon or to look intensely at. In fact, it's the Greek word from which we get our English word *theater*. It's that idea. Jesus is saying don't do what you do as an act of theater, to be seen, to be on center stage, to draw the attention and applause. This was a huge struggle for the Pharisees in the first century. A number of times in the New Testament, we're told of this struggle. For example in John 5:44, Jesus says to them, "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?" John 12:43. "they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God."

So what is going on in Matthew 6:1? Jesus is dealing with the motive behind our acts of righteousness, behind our obedience to the Scripture. In chapter 5, He says true disciples will obey the Scripture. In chapter 6, He's telling us they'll do it for the right reason. You see, it's not enough to do the right thing. It's not enough merely to obey God. The scribes and Pharisees sometimes did that. To be acceptable before God--our acts of righteousness as believers--we have to do it for the right reason. In this passage, Jesus tells us, if you're going to do the right thing in order to be seen, then you're just like the hypocrites. He says that three times as this passage unfolds. What does He mean, the hypocrites? Who are they? What does that mean?

Well, the Greek word is a word you'll recognize because the Greek word translated *hypocrite* is *hupokrites*. You see, hypocrite is not a translation at all. It's a transliteration. It's simply taking each of the Greek letters and transliterating them into an English letter. *Hypocrite* is a Greek word in other words, anglicized. But what does the word mean? Well in classical Greek (this would have been several hundred years before the New Testament was written) it was used exclusively in a good sense. It was used primarily to refer to actors in the Greek theater. Greek actors performed their plays in front of an audience of thousands, usually in an outdoor amphitheater. I've had the opportunity to sit in some of those great outdoor amphitheaters that were part of the Greek world. Maybe you have as well. And the stage is a great distance from you. What the actors would do in that setting is, they would wear these large masks. The masks would help the audience, from a distance, be able to distinguish what part they were playing at that moment. And in fact, sometimes it was common for an actor to portray more than one part in the same play on the same day. And so he would simply go offstage, don a new mask and now he would be recognizable in a different character. In addition to that, because there was no sound amplification, often times buried within the mask was a mechanical device for enlarging the voice much like our modern megaphone. And so this word *hypocrite* simply means actor. You can see how it developed. Eventually, it came to describe someone who wears a mask and plays a part, someone who sees the world as a stage and himself as the object of attention. By the first century, by the time Jesus walked the earth, this Greek word has lost all positive connotation whatsoever and it was only a negative word. It spoke of a person who was not what he pretended to be. He was an actor in the worst possible sense. One author puts it this way: "This person lays aside his true identity and assumes a false one. He is no longer himself, but in disguise impersonating somebody else. He is wearing a mask." Jesus uses this word *hypocrite* twenty times in the gospels. Most of the time it's referring to the scribes and Pharisees. For example in Matthew 23, He uses it eight times (either the word hypocrites or hypocrisy) to refer to the scribes and Pharisees. Clearly as we will see as this passage unfolds in Matthew 6, the hypocrites of chapter 6 are in fact the scribes and the Pharisees.

So what is Jesus saying? Listen carefully. Jesus is warning us as His true disciples, to beware of the danger of manifesting the same kind of hypocrisy the scribes and Pharisees did. In fact, at one point He comes out explicitly and says this. In Luke 12:1, "Jesus began saying to His disciples first of all, 'Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees (*that's a powerful word picture - beware of the subtle but completely insidious and invading influence of the Pharisees. And then He finishes the sentence this way*), which is hypocrisy.'" That was the greatest danger of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus says beware of merely playing a part as theater in order to be noticed. But what is the real objective of a hypocrite? It's not just to be noticed. It goes one step beyond that, doesn't it? It's to be noticed and therefore to be praised, to be admired, to be adored. Look at that person. Look at what he did. Look at what she did. Look at how they pray. Look at how they give. Look at how often they're at church. Look at how they serve. Look at what a spiritually mature person that man or that woman is. Now in what sense is this hypocrisy? The

hypocrite is pretending to do what he does out of love for God, when in reality he's doing it for himself and out of love for himself which is the definition of hypocrisy. He's putting on a mask. He's pretending. John Broadus, the great Civil War era commentator, writes: "What our Lord forbids, is therefore, not publicity in performing good deeds, which is often necessary and therefore proper, but ostentatious publicity for the purpose of attracting attention and gaining applause." Now when you look in the New Testament, there are three types of hypocrisy and I reserve the right at some point in the next few weeks to come back to this, okay, and expand this. But let me just give them to you, three types of hypocrisy.

First of all, there is the person who pretends to be good, when they are actually evil, and they know they're being deceptive. A good example of this would be in Matthew 22:15 ff where the scribes and Pharisees decide to entrap Jesus. And they send a representative who goes up to Jesus and says: Teacher, you're such a wonderful teacher and You always speak the truth. We know You always speak the truth and so we have a question for You--when in reality there was only evil in their hearts. They intended to trap Him and kill Him. They were completely and utterly deceptive. They knew they were evil and they were putting on the guise of good. Sadly, in a crowd this size, I am confident there are one or more here who are hypocrites of this kind. You know that you are evil at the core. You love sin and you pursue it, but for whatever reasons, you put on a façade, a mask when you're around other Christians. That's a form of hypocrisy.

There's another form of hypocrisy and this is the person who is so carried away by his own hypocrisy that he deceives himself, but his hypocrisy isn't good enough to deceive others. They see through it, but he takes himself seriously. A great example of this would be in chapter 7, we'll get there, where Jesus tells the rather humorous story of the person who has a log sticking out of his own eye and volunteers to help his friend get a splinter out of his eye. Here's a person who is completely clueless. They have deceived themselves. They think they are spiritual and they can help this other person remove this little problem from their life when in reality they've got this great big log sticking out of their own eye. Everybody else sees it, but they don't see it.

There's a third form of hypocrisy and this is the person who plays the part of spirituality so well that he not only deceives himself, but he actually deceives the people around him as well. This is a frightening kind of hypocrisy. We'll get to it at the end of chapter 7, where Jesus says: at the judgment there will be many who will stand before Him and say, Lord, Lord, look at what we did for You. Look at how impressive our lives were. Look at the, even, miraculous things we were engaged in. And He will say to them, "Depart from Me; I never knew you..." Here's a person who deceives himself and deceives the people around as well.

You know, whatever type it is, hypocrisy is absolutely pervasive in our world. Do you understand that unbelievers struggle with hypocrisy? This is a sin that knows no boundaries, no nationalities, no gender, no faith. Hypocrisy is pervasive. And the fact that Jesus here warns us to beware, means that we too can be guilty of this sin. So how do we recognize this sin so that we

can beware of it? Well, wherever you find the sin of hypocrisy, whatever type it is, it always has certain characteristics. Let's look at the common characteristics of hypocrisy. I hesitated to give these to you because I really might come back and develop this a little more, because there's much to say about this, but what are the common characteristics of hypocrisy? Wherever you find it, you'll find these things. Number one: a preoccupation with sins of action instead of sins of the heart, a preoccupation with external action as opposed to the sins of the heart. You saw this in chapter 5. The scribes and Pharisees – they congratulated themselves because they didn't commit murder and they didn't commit adultery. And Jesus comes in and says, Yeah, but, but what about the heart? What about the anger that leads to murder? What about the lust that makes you every bit as morally guilty of adultery as the act does? But this is how hypocrisy always is. It focuses on sins of action rather than sins of the heart because even an unbeliever can control some external behavior, but he can't change his heart.

A second common characteristic of hypocrisy is a preoccupation with the sins of others instead of one's own sins. You see this in Matthew 7 again with that story of the beam and the splinter. Here's a person who spends his life trying to help other people get the splinters out of their eyes and doesn't see, at all, his own sin, doesn't deal with his own sin at all. Here's a person who sees sin all around him. All of these people around me are sinful, they're awful, but he or she is always the paragon of spiritual virtue, always the hero of their spiritual stories, at least in their own mind. Where there's hypocrisy, there is a dwelling on the sins of others instead of one's own sins.

Thirdly, there is a preoccupation with human rules and tradition, rather than God's Word. Over and over again, Jesus rebukes the scribes and Pharisees for following human tradition and neglecting the Bible. And wherever you find hypocrisy, that's what you will find – an overemphasis on--oh they may say it's biblical--but it's their own tradition passed down from generation to generation. And that becomes more important than what the clear teachings of Scripture say and sometimes it even contradicts it.

Number four: there'll be a preoccupation with less important commands - in this case, truly biblical commands, but a preoccupation with less important biblical commands - while neglecting the weightier commands. Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees, yeah, it's true. You tithe your garden herbs. And when you're going to drink something, you strain it – that wine or that water-- you strain it carefully with a piece of cloth so that an unclean gnat doesn't get in it, and you consume a gnat that's unclean. But you neglect compassion and justice and the weightier issues of the law, Jesus says. Wherever there's hypocrisy, there will be a focusing on – they may be biblical concepts--but they're not the important biblical concepts. They're not the overarching, weighty ones. They tend to be the trivia. I grew up, not in my own home to a large extent, but certainly in the churches I was affiliated with, and I went to school at a place where

legalism was rampant, and it always focuses on the less important issues and neglects the weighty ones.

Number five: where there is hypocrisy, there will be a preoccupation with appearance rather than purity. Jesus says to the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23, You know, you're so worried about the outside of the cup. I mean, you clean it and you wash it and you make it nice, but the inside is full of corruption and self-indulgence and sin. You whitewash the tomb, but you forget that the inside is full of death, decay. Hypocrites are always worried with how they look, how others are perceiving them, but they don't give the same amount of attention to cleaning the heart.

But those common characteristics are not the real problem with hypocrisy. The real problem with hypocrisy – let's call it the heart of hypocrisy or the core, the essence of hypocrisy. Why is hypocrisy such a deadly danger? Why is it so bad? It's because of the sin that lies at its heart. The real danger of hypocrisy is not primarily the desire to win the approval of other people. The real danger of hypocrisy is actually (are you ready for this?) the sin of idolatry. When our greatest desire is to be noticed by men, whom are we worshipping at that moment? Let me give you a clue. It's not God. Now you might be tempted to say - and I've heard some pastors say this - when you're concerned about others, you're really worshipping them. That's not even true. In the end, when I'm seeking the approval of others, it's nothing more than a form of self-worship. This is clear in the English text, but it's even clearer in the Greek text. Let me show it to you. Matthew 5:16. "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Now flip over to 6:2. Jesus gets to the first example, giving to the poor. He says: "When you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and the streets (*now watch this*), so that they may be (*and our translator has chosen the word 'honored'.* The Greek word is the word 'glorify' - same word back in 5:16)." You see the point? The sincere Christian's motivation is that God will be glorified. The hypocrite's motivation is that he will be glorified. Hypocrisy is a form of idolatry. It's a form of idolatry in which I seek to become the object of people's adoration. Instead of wanting God's name to be hallowed, I want my name to be hallowed. Instead of wanting God's kingdom to advance, I want my kingdom to advance. Instead of wanting God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, I want my will to be done on earth as God's will is done in heaven. Hypocrisy is idolatry. It is idolatry in which I steal the glory from God. That's the heart of hypocrisy.

So we've seen the danger of hypocrisy. We've seen the nature of hypocrisy. Let's consider thirdly the consequences of hypocrisy. What are the consequences of obeying God in such a way as to be seen by others? Well, there are two of them that just jump off the pages of Matthew. First of all, the first consequence is, it may demonstrate an unredeemed heart. You see, more than half of the times this word *hypocrite* is used in the New Testament and most of the times it's

used in Matthew, it is used of people who do not have a redeemed heart. You see, if you consistently, as a pattern of life, are putting on a mask, playing a part, pretending, then it's very possible you're not a believer at all. Don't misunderstand me. Christians can act hypocritically. We all do. And in fact, in Galatians 2, Peter acts in hypocrisy and Barnabas acts in hypocrisy – that word's actually used to describe their behavior. But that's different. Acting like a hypocrite is different than being a hypocrite. You see, the comparison Jesus makes here in Matthew 6 is between you, My disciples, don't act like hypocrites, and those who are hypocrites. Because you're My disciples and you aren't hypocrites, don't act hypocritically, because the end of those who truly are hypocrites is eternal hell. They're not believers at all. Jesus is very clear about this. Turn over to Matthew 23:13 as He gives these woes to the scribes and Pharisees, He says: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; *(you hear what Jesus is saying? He's saying you teach a wrong way to be made right with God. In New Testament terms, you teach a false gospel. And then He says, verse 13) for you do not enter in yourselves, (you are unbelievers - you've never truly entered the kingdom, you hypocrites) nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.*" Verse 15: "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; *(have somebody embrace what you believe)* and when he becomes one of your proselytes, you make him *(and this is frightening, you make him)* twice as much a son of hell as yourselves." This is Jesus. He's saying to these scribes and Pharisees, Listen. You're bound for eternal hell and you're making your converts anticipate the same.

Turn over to chapter 24. Jesus tells the parable of the unfaithful slave. He puts his slaves in charge. He leaves on a long trip. This is obviously a picture of what's happened right now while Jesus has ascended into heaven and is going to come again. Verse 48:

"But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,' and he begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; *(in other words, his behavior begins to belie his profession of having this master)* the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him in pieces *(and watch this)* and assign him a place with the hypocrites; *(what place is that?)* in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

It's one thing to act like a hypocrite from time to time. That's a deadly danger to us who are in Christ. But if there is a consistent pattern of hypocrisy in your life; if you are in essence wearing a mask as a pattern of life; this is your destiny if you're not willing to repent.

There's a second consequence of hypocrisy and this consequence is for those of us who are disciples of Jesus. For us, it means this: it will destroy any potential reward. Look back at Matthew 6:1: "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them;

otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.” Jesus says, if you are obeying God with the motive of being noticed by people, you’re not getting any reward from God – none. You know, giving to the poor – that’s a good thing. Praying – good thing. Fasting – good thing. All legitimate spiritual activities. But Jesus says if you do those legitimate spiritual activities, but in doing them you care more about people seeing you than seeking God’s approval, then you’re getting nothing from God. You see, you have to choose. You can either care that God sees and seek His approval and His reward, or you can care that people see and seek their affirmation and build your reputation with them, but you can’t do both at the same time. Why is that? Because in your choice, you’re choosing your reward. You’re going to get what you want, is what Jesus is saying. If you do what you do for the praise and approval of people, you’re going to get the praise and approval of people, and that’s all you’re getting. Notice He says this three different times. Verse 2 - if you give in order to be seen, the end of verse 2: “Truly I say to you, you have your reward in full.” Verse 5 - if you pray to be seen, the end of verse 5: “For truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.” Verse 16 - if you fast to be seen: “Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.” Jesus says that’s what they wanted. They wanted the praise and adoration of people. They got it and they’re getting nothing else. Folks, this is a sobering warning to us all. We must never substitute the goal of seeking God’s approval with the trivial and idolatrous goal of seeking the approval of other people, because Jesus’ warning here allows absolutely no exceptions. Do you understand that? If you perform any righteous deed, any spiritual activity whatsoever, but you do so so that others will see you, so that they will praise you, then you have absolutely no reward for that activity with God whatsoever. It doesn’t matter how good or how great that activity might have been. You know what frightens me about that? It means I can live my whole life in a way that appears to be completely devoted to God, yet at the end of my life I will have gained nothing but human applause. D.A. Carson writes: “The hypocrites get what they’re after, but that’s all they get. The whole thing turns out to be a successful public relations stunt and no more. There is no real act of righteousness, no genuine piety and no reward from God.” You see, your spiritual activities, your obedience must be done for God to see, not for people to see. At any given moment, you have to ask yourself am I doing this to get glory for God, or am I doing this to get glory for me? Our faith must be genuine. It must be sincere and not merely a mask in order to build my reputation with others. And when we do that, when we perform our spiritual activities in order to be seen, to be praised by people, we have become idolaters. We are attempting at that moment to steal glory from God Himself. Jesus says, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.” Beware of the deadly danger of hypocrisy.

Let me ask you – why do you do what you do? Why do you read your Bible? Why do you pray? Why do you serve in the church? Why do you come to the corporate gathering of the church for worship? Whom do you want to see? Let’s pray together.

Our Father, we are confronted and humbled and convicted by this passage because not one of us has not played the part of a hypocrite. Lord, every single one of us has been guilty of this sin. I pray that You would give us a heart that longs to do what we do for Your approval, to hear You say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Father, I pray that You would help us to live not for our own glory but for Your glory, to do what we do for You. Lord, help us to be aware of the danger that lurks around us all the time and that can sneak up and surprise us.

Father, I also pray for those here today who are living a consistent lie, who are wearing the mask as a pattern of life. I pray that today You would strip away the mask and help them to see themselves in the mirror of Your word as You see them. And may they find a quiet and secret place somewhere before this day is done, where they pour out their hearts to You who sees in secret. May they cry out for a changed heart, a heart that longs to glorify You and to serve You. May they rely on the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone. May their only hope be His death, and not any righteousness of theirs. Father, I pray that You would do that work, that there would be people, who as a result of our Lord's teaching today, would take off the mask and become genuine followers of Jesus Christ. We pray it for His glory. Amen.