



Sermon Notes: Steve Stanis,

03 March 2024

“You Hypocrites”

Readings: Matt 23: 1-39, Psalm 15:1-5

The Pharisees failed to be amazed at God’s grace in their lives!

This passage cuts to the heart. I read it and want to point the finger at those who need to take heed. To those who behave like hypocrites in my life! To those who have hurt me!

Let me make this clear, times haven’t changed; it is as much inside the Church family as outside! Hence my passion that we must build a community of humble believers at KAC!

If you are like me, take a breath before we begin. Just as Michael Birrell led the 10am congregation, last Sunday, I encourage you to do this as I lead you through the sermon today!

Inhale, exhale, confess.

These words of Jesus are striking and while they are a sharp call out to the pharisees, I am reminded that the Bible is God’s living Word: so straight up, I want to challenge my, and our, pharisaical attitudes, so that as we read this passage, we are not pointing the finger away from us, but it is God’s truth speaking straight into our hearts.

The Pharisees failed to be amazed at God’s grace in their lives! They looked educated, clean and alive, while dying on the inside. Has anything really changed within God’s grace in our lives today? Our confident appearances and practices can be a cover for the uncertainty and hypocrisy we all live with, just like the pharisees.

Pharisees should know better. They are informed. We are informed. We can be like the pharisees when our preferences drive how church should be. Our preferences drive how a Christian behaves. Our preferences create our prejudices. We are informed, and we should know better. We should be amazed by God’s grace.

The problem with Pharisees is not simply that they preach a false gospel of works. That is a serious flaw. The real problem is the pride and greed and fear underneath any works-based confidence in ourselves. That pride and greed and fear (or whatever we struggle with) eventually sever our mind and mouth from our heart.

Jesus rebukes the Pharisees in Matthew 15, saying ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me’. They had developed ways of appearing to be godly without really preferring and prioritising God in their hearts. What they knew about God was disconnected from God’s grace, and therefore left them even further from God.

If we are serious about God’s grace, we must beware the symptoms of gracelessness. The grace of our Saviour counteracts all of our woes! So, how would we know if we have subtly become a modern-day Pharisee? Jesus gives us at least five signposts along the highway away from grace.

Now it is time to take a breath. **Inhale, exhale, confess....**

1. Pharisees know what to say, but do not do what they say.

Jesus says, “They preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger” (Matt 23:3-4). Beware the dissonance between what you say you believe and the reality of how you live and refuse to make peace with it.

We are not perfect, so there will always be some dissonance. We are always confessing this side of glory. But look closely at any consistent or reoccurring departure; in spending and giving, in serving, in relating to your spouse or children, in loving your neighbour, in indulging in secret failing.

What excuses do you make for the choices that entangle you? The Pharisees were happy to point this out in others, and even happier to excuse it in themselves.

Open the door in your honest reflection. Practice what you preach!

Pause: **Inhale, exhale, confess....**

2. Pharisees practice their faith to be seen by others.

Jesus goes on, “They do all their deeds to be seen by others” (Matt 23:5). The Pharisees prayed to be seen by others. They served the poor to be seen by others. They obeyed the Scriptures to be seen by others. And they received what they really wanted: recognition and esteem from others.

Jesus warns, though, “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”. (Matthew 6:1)

Is your faith consistently aiming for acceptance or approval or affirmation? Are you faithful mainly for the social benefits? Or do you pray, and serve, and give “to the glory of God” for “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ”, as Philippians 3:8 encourages us.

If so, the reward from your Father will be fullness of joy forevermore.

If this is your belief, trust and then breathe more easily, as you **Inhale, exhale, confess...** with thanks for your gracious God!

3. Pharisees keep people from Jesus and his grace.

Jesus brings a third indictment in Matthew 23,

“You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” (Matt 23:13-15)

One of the greatest dangers of being Pharisaical is that it’s contagious. When we disconnect our heart from our head, subtly putting our confidence in our flesh, we lead other people away from Jesus with us. Are people seeing our lives, amazed by grace? Does our influence in their lives widen their eyes and heart to the wonder that God would save any of us? If we are filled with mercy, do we show compassion to others that is beyond measure, as Jesus has shown to us?

4. Pharisees lack love for people in need.

Besides their contempt of Jesus, the most glaring warning light in the Gospels is the Pharisees' lack of love for people, especially people in need. Jesus rebukes them, "You tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!" (Matt 23:23-24).

They looked for every conceivable reason *not* to help the poor, oppressed, and needy. They looked down on Jesus for sitting with these people, instead of having compassion on them. Those who have died with Christ have died to themselves, and live for the needs and interests of others, whoever God has placed in our path. Jesus calls us to have a heart that desires justice.

Is our greatest struggle today with avoidance and protective behaviours? Lacking love for people in need starts small but it spreads like wildfire.

5. Pharisees cover up denying Christ instead of confessing and repenting.

Jesus exposes the Pharisees a fifth time;

"You clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean... You are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." (Matt 23:25-28)

Lawful on the outside, but full of lawlessness. Bleached exterior walls, but full of darkness. A conservative, moral, and religious social media profile, but running from God with every secret click.

If we make every effort to cover our poor choices and hide our need, we clearly have not understood the Gospel, and we have not embraced grace. Pharisees say they have fellowship with Jesus while they walk in darkness. Lovers of Jesus confess our need for Him, knowing "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Do you recognise any of these symptoms in yourself?

If we begin to sense a disconnect between our head and our heart, what we say and who we are, the solution is not simply more head: Read more. Do more courses. Google more definitions and explanations.

The knowledge is vital, but it is not the key to reviving our hearts. *God and His Spirit* are. Knowledge doesn't open eyes and ears. *God* does. God must drag whatever each of us knows about Him into our hearts and light it, by His Spirit, with faith, and love, and joy.

The apostle Paul prays for this, "I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, *may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened*" (Eph 1:16-18).

Paul doesn't say put away knowledge, or neglect theology, or disregard difficult questions in the Bible. No, he simply prays that God would set all of that thinking on fire in our hearts; that He would make grace compelling and Jesus satisfying to us.

Faithfulness and Meekness:

So, rather than being pharisaical, Jesus calls us to display Spiritual fruit. In the list of spiritual fruit in Galatians 5:22-23 “faithfulness” and “meekness” are listed next to each other.

“Faithfulness” has to do with the keeping of promises, and the courageous declaration of truth.

“Meekness” has to do with mildness and gentleness in dealing with people. To be generous, humble, and considerate toward others.

An attitude and tone devoid of graciousness, of faithfulness and meekness, of forgetting to speak tenderly and generously to others, lacks Jesus’ amazing grace.

But the fruit of the Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus himself, always offers faithfulness and meekness, that is the grace of God.

It is tricky to balance these traits, however. Those of us of a meeker personality should be careful not to overly disdain the “faithfulness” crowd, since it is always possible that we are slipping into cowardice and compromise. But those of us of a more confrontational nature should also be careful not to overly disdain the “gentleness” crowd, since it is possible that we are slipping into pride and self-importance. Have you ever dared to ask someone you trust how you come across to others? It is never too late to learn.

Let us examine ourselves.

Pause: **Inhale, exhale, confess...**

How do we remain faithful and meek? Like Jesus, we must have compassion. Having called the pharisees hypocrites, He also wants to heal them, not judge them.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.” (Matt 23:37)

How easily we judge! This is arrogance. Arrogance is fuelled by pride, not humility. Our humility should be driven by God’s justice, taking responsibility to defend victims and the defenceless, action that is righteous, not reckless.

Secondly, I want to call out our false humility. We are all hypocrites about something, masquerading as non-judgemental. Examine your hearts. Verse 24 ‘You blind guides!’ Verse 39 ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’

So, if we grasp the question, ‘Who is Jesus?’, we grasp our tomorrow. We all desire a life well lived. What is a life well lived? A life of faithful meekness, in humility, seeking justice and peace for all, to point all to the Kingdom of Heaven. This is what is so amazing about grace!

Amen