WATCHING OUT FOR HYPOCRISY IN OUR LIVES

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Scripture: Matthew 23: 1-7, Deuteronomy 6

Matthew 23:1-7
*"**23** Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: [2] "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. [3] So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. [4] They tie up heavy, loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.*
[5] "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; [6] they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; [7] they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi'."

Hypocrisy is commonly used especially when we talk about others. What is hypocrisy? A standard definition: "Saying one thing but doing just the opposite; or having double standards." In today's scripture reading, Jesus made three points on hypocrisy.

Matthew 23 is commonly called the seven woes. The word hypocrisy appears six times in this passage. So, each time Jesus spoke about one of the woes, he exposed one aspect of hypocrisy.

1. Verse 2-3 says: *The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey and do everything they tell you, but do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.*
   This is the first thing which commonly defines hypocrisy.

2. Verse 4 says: *They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.*
   As you know, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were very strict about the letter of the law. The problem was they did not exhibit any mercy. They were very legalistic and insister on the letter of the law and forgot the spirit of the law.

   In Matthew 22, we saw the Pharisees and the leaders targeting Jesus, trying somehow to catch Him on something which He taught. And the sad part was that unfortunately, they were seeing how they could rather than looking at what Jesus did. If they had really searched, they would have found that He indeed was the Messiah to come.

   But an interesting thing we find about Jesus is that even to this group of Pharisees, every time when they asked something, Jesus had a comeback. For example, when they talked about paying taxes to Caesar, Jesus said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's." He could have stopped there. But Jesus added, "And give to God what is God's." He was reminding them that they belong to God. So, basically, they need to give themselves back to God.

   At the end of ch. 23, Jesus' complaint is: "I was willing to have you, but you are not willing." That shows the heart of Jesus. Even in the midst of exposing them, He said, "I was willing to have you, but you are not willing."

3. Verse 5: Jesus said that everything they do is done for men to see, and they made their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long.
   This is a reference to Deuteronomy 6 which we will refer to later.

But I want to expand on what Jesus said, “Everything they do is done for men to see,” so that we can watch out for that in our lives.

Matthew 6: 1-4
[1] Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. if you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.
[2] So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. [3] But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Importantly, this portion is talking about showing the acts of righteousness. Jesus is using the word – when you give to the needy. He did not say if you give to the needy. We need to give to the needy. But the aspect Jesus wanted to bring out is: What is the motive behind it? What is your attitude? The Pharisees gave so that they would be honored by others.

Sometimes, you can have that kind of an attitude. But remember, v. 3 is a warning for us. “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so your giving may be in secret. Then your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” That’s the important thing, and the Pharisees forgot that. They looked for honor from others. But they did not remember that there is a God who is seeing them in secret.

So, whatever we do, in fact, it’s kind of scary that our life is completely open before God. There is nothing secret in our life including the good things which seemingly nobody might notice. But God has noticed it. And that should be. This particular verse is a promise. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And that should be our consolation. So, it exposed them, the Pharisees. Their identity was all about what others think about them. and we should never get into that kind of a situation.

Let’s go back and look at some verses from the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5-7 , and a smaller version in Luke’s gospel. Jesus is primarily addressing the kingdom values or what God is primarily looking at in our lives. But one common mistake many Christians make is to idealize the Sermon on the Mount.

Let me say something but let me say it very carefully. Do not ever try to practice these things, which are mentioned in Matthew 5-7, in your strength hoping that it will make you a better Christian. Please don’t misunderstand me. This is impossible to do in your strength.

But then, why is it written there? Matthew 5:48 says, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Yes, these are kingdom values, but what Jesus is telling His disciples is that you cannot do this. But God’s spirit is able to do that in our lives.

What Jesus expects from our life is to run to Him. And we sang many choruses about this. It’s all about You. You know I can’t do it. coming, running to God, saying, “Lord, this is your expectation, but I can’t do it. But You can make me do it.

If we surrender our lives, if you are a child of God, God’s spirit is residing in you. God’s spirit is a permanent resident in your heart. and God’s spirit is able to transform you, to change you, to get all

that is mentioned in Matthew's gospel 5-7. Slowly, but steadily. God is able to do that. And that's the important thing to remember.

But again, those things are never for show, but to live as God's children. Sanctification is all about submitting our lives into the control of God's spirit. God's spirit can mold us and transform us. that means our thoughts, our attitudes, our motives. So that others, when they see Christ in us, they will be attracted towards Christ.

And that's the spirit. God's spirit is able to do it. and God's spirit will do it. If only you are willing and you have surrendered your lives to the Lord.

So let me talk about some of the attitudes which we need to have, which Jesus brought out very powerfully. You would see this in Matthew 5: 3-8. Let me read the first six Beatitudes for you.

- **Blessed are the poor in spirit,** for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- **Blessed are those who mourn,** for they will be comforted.
- **Blessed are the meek,** for they will inherit the earth.
- **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,** for they will be filled.
- **Blessed are the merciful,** for they will be shown mercy.
- **Blessed are the pure in heart,** for they will see God,

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is saying, you are blessed if you realize that you are spiritually poor, that you realize your spiritual poverty. Then you are blessed. Why? Because then you will run to the Lord. And God's spirit can make you. And He says, "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. If you are genuinely mourning, thinking about looking at your own life, and how it's not up to what God wants it to be. The good news is you will be comforted. God will change it.

If you look at all these attitudes, meekness, or hungering and thirsting for God's righteousness, or merciful, or pure in heart – none of these were things which the Pharisees were after. Poor in spirit? Never. They always wanted to show that they were superior to others.

Now, having said all this, how to avoid hypocrisy, or to prevent the kind of pitfalls of the Pharisees in our lives. I want us to look at three aspects of our inner life, which is seen by God.

1. **Who we are inwardly is far more important to God than what we do**. I think that was exactly the problem of the Pharisees. They thought just the other way. They thought what we do defined who we are inwardly. The Sermon on the Mount keeps on saying that our being is far more important than our doing.

   What we do should come out of who we really are. And Jesus stated it very well in Matthew 7:8. He said, "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit." So, the being always comes before the doing.

   Therefore, we should always be concerned about being righteous in God's eyes. If you're a child of God, we can be happy because God's Spirit is residing in your heart and is working continuously so that He can reshape you to make you into the image of Christ. But only if we allow the Spirit to do so. Willingness is what is expected from us.

Also, you must have the right attitude – Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Do you have that kind of a spirit when you come before God? Do you think that you are not worthy of all that the Lord does in your life?

Do we come with that kind of spiritual poverty? Then God is able to enrich you. Once we have that kind of an attitude, we'll never ever be proud or boastful like the Pharisees. Let me say something. You should never compare yourself with others. This is a big temptation for all of us. If you're honest with yourself, you'll see that. We always love to see how we are superior to somebody, but we never compare ourself as inferior to somebody.

That's exactly what the Pharisees did. Luke 18, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector praying. The Pharisee's prayer was all about himself, whereas the tax collector could not even look up. All he said was, "Lord, have mercy on me, a miserable sinner." And he went back justified.

So never get in the habit of comparing yourself with somebody, because God knows who you are. And that's all that matters. His spirit is working in your heart. You are unique. God has a plan for your life. So, that's what we should be concerned about.

2. **Always have a heavenly perspective.** Our perspective in life is extremely important. Always be conscious of our final destination. Have the attitude of a pilgrim. The problem is that most of us think and live as though we are going to be permanent residents on earth. We are not. One day we have to leave this place. Therefore, we need to be conscious about our final destination. But the saddest part is we are living at a time when there is information overload. Our minds are overly occupied.

   Paul reminded the Philippian church, in Philippians 3:20, "Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." And that should be our spirit. I'm sure all of us have our own problems every day – anxieties, troubles, challenges, difficulties – it's all a part of life. but in the midst of all that, don't get lost. Remember your final destination – that will change.

   Two words which come very beautifully in many epistles – "Living hope." Peter and Paul, both talk about it. Our hope is not just a story; it's true, a living hope. So, we have to live as people who are going to be accountable to God. Therefore, there is no need to compare ourselves with anybody else. Our entire life is visible to God.

   Therefore, be aware of God's purpose for your life, and keep busy doing that. everyday should be a prayer: Lord, today help me to fulfil your plan for my life. All our choices, our decisions should be taken in the light of the eternal perspective as people who are going to be accountable to God. We need to evaluate and see whether they are in alignment with the eternal perspective which God has given us. Satan tries to keep us busy all the time, so beware.

3. **Allow God's word to enrich you and transform you.**
   Colossians 3:16, Paul wrote "Let the word of God dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom."

   So, the question is: How can I have God's word dwelling in me richly? Two weeks ago, when we talked about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we talked about one of the

dangers/temptations all of us face today. The mobile phone, social media, the TV – all major distractions and we should be careful to cut down the time spent there. but at the same time, be sure to replace it with something else. Replace it with God's word. Read, and re-read, and meditate on God's word.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 gives you some ideas about how to have God's word dwelling in us richly.
"4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.
5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.
6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.
7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.
8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.
9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."

They took that but they forgot the rest of it. And especially this particular one. "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts."

I want to leave with you two important words.

- Reflecting on God's word.
- Meditating on God's word.

Reflecting on God's word.
When you talk about reflecting on God's word, this a word that Paul uses a few times.
2 Timothy 2:7 "Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this." This is the portion where Paul starts by saying "Be strong in the Lord."
Then he takes the example of a soldier and a farmer and an athlete. At the end, Paul says reflect on what I am saying for the Lord will give you insight into all this.
So, it's a good use of our minds, reflecting while critically thinking to gain insight.

The portion which we read in Deuteronomy 6 is an excellent portion to reflect on. How can I have that in my heart? Reflect on it. Critically think about it. Ask for insight. Now you are using your mind in a very positive way. And it's not left empty.

Meditating on God's word.
This word comes very often in the Old Testament. Especially in Psalm 119. It's all about God's word, and the word meditating comes again and again.

Psalm 1:2 "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." This is about a person who is a blessed man. So, if you want to be blessed, one of the secrets mentioned here is his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law, he meditates day and night. Do you really delight to spend time in God? If you want God's word to dwell in you richly, then one of the fist things we need to have is that attitude of delighting. Longing to read God's word – read it, re-read it, meditate on it, write it. Think of whatever ways you can let the word of God dwell richly in you. We need to do more and more of that.

We are living in a dangerous age. We have information overload, and most of it you don't need. Therefore, don't be under any compulsion to go through all the forwards you get on your mobile. I have a simple rule. Uless somebody writes about that particular forward, I don't open it. We need to be very carful about how we engage our minds. Satan is after our mind. Young people, old people, all

of us, we need to be careful how we use our mind. Therefore, let God's word enrich you. And then God will transform you.

Let me end by reading this wonderful prayer from Psalm 51:10 which David prayed. "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

Spend a few quiet minutes asking God's spirit to look into your lives and reflect and surrender your lives. as Jesus said in Matthew 24, I was willing, but you are not willing. If you are willing, God's spirit can transform you.

Let us pray. Amen.

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