

Living Authentically
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One of the better known stories of Jesus is his rumble in the temple (as it might affectionately be called). As the story goes, Jesus walks into the temple courtyard and sees people making money off of the religious pilgrims trying their best to worship God. Commercial vendors pushing their products was so out of place in the temple and so offensive to Jesus that he physically flips over the tables and drives the moneychangers out in dramatic fashion; he was not going to stand for it. Jesus says, as the scriptures say, "My Father's house is a house of prayer and you made it into a den of robbers." When the Apostle John records this in his gospel, he remembers what the prophecy says about Jesus, which is, "Zeal for your house shall consume me." It sure did.

Zeal. Passion. Jesus had a lot of it. While it's not as famous, the time Jesus rebuked the teachers of the Law and the lawyers rivals his scorching heat and anger found in the temple scene. While he didn't destroy any furniture, Jesus' words were blunt and pointed. Half way through his rebuke, the lawyers say to Jesus (as we will read in a moment), "in saying these things you insult us!" That's how strong Jesus' words were; they were insulting to his listeners. Unfortunately, the people missed that Jesus was actually trying to help them by boldly confronting their hypocrisy.

We are going to spend two weeks talking about this passage. Next week, we are going to examine the specifics of Jesus' complaints about these religious leaders and teachers. There's some very important information in there for us as we seek to live lives pleasing to the Lord. Today, we're going step back and examine how important it is for us to have consistency between our internal beliefs and our actions and words. You won't stand strong without that. Let's look at why this is important to Jesus (READ Luke 11:37ff).

It almost seems Jesus is picking this fight, but he's not the one in the wrong. Take a look at what happens. He's invited to a dinner party. When you're invited to someone's house, what do you do? Well, if you have any manners, you try to be appreciative, courteous, and respectful. When I visit somebody I try to get a feel for what's expected of me and comply as much as I'm able. While Jesus is the guest it doesn't stop him from ignoring the expectations of his host and giving him a verbal beatdown in his own home. What should we make of this? Is this Jesus just being rude? Anytime you read the scriptures it's important for you to remember some important things. 1) The Scriptures are inspired by God, which means it's as if God breathed them out himself. God has truthful information he wants us to see through this episode. 2) Jesus is never in the wrong; he's is God himself. Sometimes, we might have an initial impression that rubs us the wrong way, but when you dig deeper you realize this first initial impression wasn't correct.

Instead of thinking something is wrong with Jesus and his behavior, say to yourself, "There must be something really wrong with this host, with this situation, that would get Jesus so upset." Let me tell you what that is: the situation that stirred the rebuke was Jesus' failure to wash himself

prior to dinner. Now, don't read this with 21st centuries glasses on thinking Jesus has poor hygiene because he doesn't wash his hands. The washing taking place is ceremonial; it's a ritual. It carries religious and cultural significance; so it's really not about having clean hands. To these religious leaders, it was about being clean and pure before God.

That's exactly what Jesus has a problem with. He was so repulsed by the idea that purity before God was about external conformity that he couldn't politely go along with these washing expectations. In fact, I think Jesus is implying that if he would have washed himself out of politeness as it was an expectation of his host, he would have validated their grotesque mischaracterization about what constitutes as purity and holiness before God. Jesus is boldly declaring in this scene purity before God and man has nothing to do with external conformity or rituals; it goes far deeper than that.

It's hard to miss Jesus' hatred of the hypocrisy he sees. Look what he says in vs. 39, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness." Later in vs. 46 he says, "Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers." Jesus sees such a disconnect with these people from what they say and what they do. And he can't take it.

That's not too surprising. There's little that disgusts us more than seeing hypocrisy. It's one of the reasons why politics repulses so many people (and rightly so). Take the recent passing of Senator John McCain. As often happens, when someone passes away who has served the public eye so long, the outpouring of appreciation and praise is ubiquitous. Every politician from every stripe was happy to gush about their respect and admiration for the late senator and Vietnam prisoner of war - even including his political rivals. But this positive press and admiration was given by the same adversaries who spread some of the worst rumors and accusations in his career. Some of his political rivals spread rumors about him fathering illegitimate children, how wife being addicted to painkillers. Some accused him of being a racist and a warmonger. Alive, John McCain was the spawn of Satan; Dead, he's a pillar of virtue that we should all emulate.

What is hypocrisy? At the heart of it, it's inconsistency. It's this "say one thing, do another." Hypocrisy is dishonesty. It's a big lie. Jesus says, "You clean the outside of the cup, but you don't do anything about the inside." And with that failure, you leave a dishonest impression.

Jesus calls this inconsistency foolish. Do you see there in his words in vs. 40 - "You fools?" Why is this inconsistency, this hypocrisy, foolish? There's a hint in the words that come after; look at what Jesus say, "Did not he who made the outside make the inside also?" What's Jesus pointing to? He's pointing to God. Why is he pointing to God? Because he's the one we give an answer to, that's why. I think Jesus is making a direct reference to the judgment of God. Let me kind of reword Jesus' statement to get across his point: He's saying, "Don't be so foolish! God made both the inside and the outside; don't you realize you have to give an answer to him about both?"

God being our Maker is one of the ways the Bible reminds us that we are accountable to him. He made us. We are his. You should care very deeply about what God thinks because of that; you will give an account to your Maker.

Listen to how Revelation 14:7 connects God's creative power to his right to judge. It says, "And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water." Jesus is obviously picking up on this connection when he says, "Did not he who made the outside make the inside also."

When we struggle with hypocrisy (notice I didn't say *if*, I said *when*... we all struggle some with this inconsistency whether we know it or not) we are forgetting the only audience that matters - God. Too often, we are overly concerned with the people around us. We care too much about what our friends think, what people at church might say, or even (remarkably) we are more concerned about impressing of total strangers. Isn't that crazy? That we would care more about the opinions of people we don't even know than about our own Creator God? Truly, how foolish!

Now compare this with what God says is the beginning, the foundation, of wisdom. In Prov. 1:7 we read, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (or wisdom)." Care about what God thinks, friends, not what others might think.

Jesus identifies the solution to this consistency problem in vs. 41, "But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you." Alms are donations of either food or money. As it still happens today, the religious leaders would give their donations of food or money with the hopes that others would see that and think well of them. But their giving was disconnected from an inner purity or care for others. Jesus is challenging them and instructing them that our acts of service should flow from an inner life that's pure and true. I'm wondering if Paul had Jesus' words in mind when he said this in Titus 1:15, "To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but both their minds and their conscience is defiled." Paul is saying the same thing, isn't he? When you're pure on the inside, when your inner life is whole and good, then everything you do will be pure, too. You won't worry about performing a certain way to impress certain people; in fact, that won't even be your concern. But when we are pure on the inside than everything else will follow along well.

I would bet that you all agree with this. You know that hypocrisy is a problem and that you don't to be hypocritical. You want your inner life and your external life to match and be in sync. But how do we do that? Let me give you some brief things that you can actually do that come from what we learned this morning.

First, pray and cultivate a greater fear of God. Fearing God means you care more about what he says and what he thinks more than anything else because you know he is the one that matters, he is the one who created you, he is the one you will give an answer to. But we don't fear God naturally. Sin blinds us from seeing God, ourselves, and the world clearly. We need the

gracious power of God's Spirit to open up our eyes to see him as he truly is. Without his ongoing help, we won't recognize the things about God and about ourselves as we need. So, we need his initial saving work to happen so we can begin to see clearly (that's what we mean when we talk about *being born again* or *being saved of our sins*), but we also need his ongoing help to see more clearly and more deeply. What that means is the work isn't done once we get saved; we need to press into the saving work of God more and more to see more of Christ in our lives. Now, what does that mean? More of Christ in me is experiencing his grace and power in such a way where my life (both inside and outside) is changed more and more. I'm more patient with my children today than I was last year. I'm more sensitive to my wife's needs than I was last year. I'll be more generous a year from now than I am today and I'm more generous today than I was last year. Do you get what I'm saying? But for that to happen, I need to keep cultivating a fear of God that was initially birthed in my life when I first believed.

Do you know how I cultivate a fear of God? I read his word. The more I read God's word, the more aware and knowledgeable I become of God. I better understand his power and might. I better see his way. I'm reminded of who I answer to. God uses his word to stir in me a right fear of God. Friends, if you see today that you need to stir more of a fear of God in your life than make a point to hear God's word more and more.

The second word of encouragement I have for you to be freed from hypocrisy prayerfully ask God to help you see and care more about your inner thoughts and desires than be impressed by what you do (REPEAT). Here's what I mean: most of you are good ole' church folk. Meaning, you all have certain practices of faith like giving, like serving. Many of you come to church regularly; you listen to Christian radio. You give a token prayer before dinner. And there's a temptation to be impressed by those things; to think, "Wow, I'm doing pretty well." Yet, you have this inner resentment to your spouse. You're secretly annoyed by so-n-so and think bad thoughts of them. Sure, you give, but you give your best to yourself and your desires. You'd never swear, but you curse people inside your heart all the time. And for the most part, that doesn't bother you. So you're impressed by your outward acts of faith, but you're unconcerned about the stuff on the inside. Friends, let us remember what matters most. It all starts with the stuff on the inside and then works itself out.

Maybe the best way to end our time in God's word is by praying. I know so many of you who follow Jesus want to honor God with genuine faith; you don't want to be hypocritical. But we need God's help, right? So, let's pray and ask for it.

Key verse - Luke 11:40

Questions for the week

- What do you think about seeing this side of Jesus? Does it change any of your perceptions? Which ones?
- What does it mean to you to live authentically and not hypocritically?
- What changes would you like to make based on what you heard today?