

Healing Our Hypocrisy

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April 1-2, 2006

Life As It Was Meant To Be Series

Matthew 6.1-6; 16-18

Some of you are familiar with the name Robert Hanssen. Bob Hanssen had a large family in Northern Virginia – six kids. The Hanssen's were very conservative Catholics. They belonged the Catholic Order Opus Dei, which has become famous through the book, The DaVinci Code. It is a very conservative brand of Roman Catholicism and the Hanssen family proudly displayed its conservative beliefs. They marched in pro-life rallies. They had anti-abortion stickers on the family van. They were also adamantly anti-gun control. Bob even collected guns. He had fourteen in the house including an Uzi semi-automatic rifle and a Walther PPK pistol.

Bob Hanssen was also an FBI agent. Everyone in the FBI took Bob Hanssen to be an absolute straight arrow. He refused to join some other agents in a bachelor party that was taking place at a strip club. In fact, he scolded some of them for doing something that he considered disgusting. One of his bosses at the FBI said that Bob Hanssen's religious faith seemed absolutely sincere. In fact, he used to talk about how the Soviet Union was bound to collapse because it was run by communists and communists don't have God in their lives.

But underneath this façade of being an upright, moral, family man, committed to his church, committed to his country, Bob Hanssen turned out to be one of the

greatest traitors in American history. Over the course of many years, Hanssen delivered more than 6000 pages of secret documents to the KGB. Some of these documents contained American nuclear deployment plans, and the position of US satellites. In return he received \$600,000 in cash, some jewelry, a Rolex watch, and the Russians claimed to have put more than \$800,000 in a bank account for him for his retirement.

Almost as surprising as Robert Hanssen being exposed as a traitor and spy on his country was the revelation that Robert Hanssen betrayed his marital vows. He posted nude photos of his wife on the Internet, photos that he secretly took of her. Equally shocking was that Bob Hanssen showered a local stripper with gifts of jewelry, money, and a silver-gray Mercedes, while his wife drove an old beat-up mini-van. He even traveled to Japan with this stripper.

From the outside, Bob Hanssen's life looked like a model of a conservative God-fearing, patriotic American family. But it was all just a façade.

Let me share with you another story. About 175 years ago there was a devout Jewish family in Germany. Their lives revolved around their Jewish community and the performance of Jewish religious customs, but the family moved from one part of Germany to another. One evening the father returned home and announced that the family would no longer be going to Jewish synagogue. Instead, they would be going to the Lutheran church. In fact, he insisted that his

children get baptized. His young son, who was very intelligent, asked him, "Father, why are we no longer going to synagogue?"

The father said, "In this part of Germany, in order to do business, it would be much more profitable for us to go to the Lutheran church."

The son became angry and embittered towards his father. He later left Germany and went to England to study. While he was in England writing in London, he penned these famous words: "Religion is the opiate of the people." Over a billion people were impacted by his atheistic philosophy. The man's name was Karl Marx.

All of us recoil instinctually against hypocrisy. In fact, if I were to gauge what is the number one objection that I've heard over the years to Christianity, it would simply be this charge: Christians are hypocrites. In other words, Christians do not live up to what they profess to believe, or what Christ taught.

But you know it is not only people who object to Christianity who are repulsed by hypocrisy. Jesus Christ was repulsed by hypocrisy. When we read the gospels, we find that the sin Christ attacked most harshly was not adultery or lying or stealing or homosexuality, or many of the things Christians focus upon today. The sin that Jesus attacked most harshly was the sin of hypocrisy.

You know what hypocrisy is. It is pretending to be someone you are not. It is pretending to be better than you are. Hypocrisy is lying about yourself, wearing a mask, playing the game of deception with others, relating as if you are morally or spiritually superior to others when you do the very same things that they do.

Now, here is the very troubling truth of hypocrisy. It is not just the Robert Hanssen's of the world, or men like the father of Karl Marx, who can be labeled hypocrite. The troubling truth about hypocrisy is that it sweeps in all of us – you, me, the kindest and most moral people we know, we all love to appear better in people's eyes than we are. We don't mind it at all when someone is deceived about our goodness. In the midst of our selfishness, we are glad when people misunderstand us and believe that we are acting with entirely good and noble intentions, even when we know that there is selfish interest involved. The charge of hypocrisy indicts all of us.

Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, the great Russian novelist, was lying on a bed of straw in a prison camp in Siberia when he came to this radical understanding. Solzhenitsyn wrote:

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I came to see that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart.

What Solzhenitsyn saw was that evil was not a communist problem, or a capitalist problem, but also his problem. He realized his need of a Savior.

What Solzhenitsyn is saying applies to every one of us. This line of evil, this line of hypocrisy runs through every human heart. In the passage that we are going to explore today, Jesus takes aim at religious hypocrisy and, therefore, he takes aim at us. I've called today's talk, "Healing Our Hypocrisy." Matthew 6.1-6; 16-18. Let's pray.

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Mt 6:1 "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' in front of others, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Mt 6:2 "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. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

Mt 6:3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

Mt 6:4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Mt 6:5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

Mt 6:6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

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Mt 6:16 "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

Mt 6:17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,

Mt 6:18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Now, if you are outlining the Sermon on the Mount, we've seen that Matthew 5.3-12 is commonly called the Beatitudes and it concerns the Christian's character. Matthew 5.21-48 concerns the Christian's behavior and has often been called the do-attitudes.

We have the Beatitudes and the Do-Attitudes; Christian character and Christian behavior. Now in Chapter 6, Jesus turns to Christian motivation. We can call Chapter 6 the Heart-Attitudes. With each successive section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus drills into us a little more deeply. Here is a description of what you should be like – Chapter 5.1-12; here is a description of what you should act like, Chapter 5.21-48; and now in chapter 6, Jesus is drilling in to why we do what we do. The drilling effects of Jesus' words in chapter 6 is a fantastic illustration of the principle we read in Hebrews 4.12,

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Heb 4:12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Jesus is going deeper with us. He wants us to pay attention to what is driving us, to what motivates us. It is not enough that you have the right behavior, if you have the wrong motives for that behavior.

Think about the way we normally teach morals to kids. We say to a child, “You shouldn’t lie, because if you lie other people won’t like you; God will be upset with you.” Or “If you lie, you are going to be like these terrible people, who are liars. You are better than that.” So often the motivation for moral behavior in Christians is fear and pride. Fear if you do this you are going to get in trouble with God or with others or pride – you are not like those dirty sinners. You are better than that.

The problem is that this kind of motivation actually strengthens sin in the heart. I had better behave myself so that God will accept me. I’d better behave myself so that I can be superior to other people. So many of the reasons why you and I have taught to be moral merely strengthen the sins of self-righteousness in us and self-centeredness.

Christian motivation is totally different. Christian motivation is rooted in a Christian’s embrace of the gospel. When I not only have an intellectual knowledge of the truth that Christ died for me, but I experience, I feel what it means that the Son of God hung on a cross for me, my heart no longer gets structured around fear and pride. As I experience the cross, my pride is melted as I realize that Jesus had to die for me. I am so lost; I am so wretched, that nothing I could ever do could save myself. Only the death of the Son of God could pay for my wickedness. It melts my pride.

It also melts my fear. Because as I experience the cross, God communicates to my soul that he was willing to give his Son even while I was his bitterest enemy. He does not want to reject me. He wants to bless my life, receive me and welcome me as his beloved son. It is the experience of the gospel that restructures my heart so that I desire to be honest and tell the truth rather than to lie. I don't need the motivations of fear and pride any more to keep me on the straight and narrow. What keeps me on the straight and narrow is my desire to experience more and more of the grace of God.

Let me ask you a question: What keeps you on the straight and narrow? What prevents you from engaging in sexual sin? What keeps you from telling a lie? What prevents you from gossiping? Plagiarizing a term paper? Cheating on an exam? Cutting corners in business? Is it fear that if I do this I'm going to get caught? God and other people will reject me. Is it pride? I'm not like the people who have affairs, who cheat and cut corners. Or, friend, is it the gospel that motivates you? Is it that your heart has been restructured around this glorious message of God's grace? That in sending his Son Jesus Christ to die for you, God has demonstrated to you that you don't need to be afraid of him. You don't need to earn his acceptance. You can be free to live the life Christ always intended you to live. What motivates you, friend?

Now in focusing upon our motivations, why we do what we do, Jesus warns us about acts of righteousness. V. 1,

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Mt 6:1 “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ in front of others, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

He focuses upon three acts of righteousness: giving, vv. 2-4, prayer, vv. 5-15, and fasting, vv. 16-18.

Now, Jesus’ warning to us to be careful in the doing of our acts of righteousness; to be on guard is really surprising because most of us think that so long as we are involved in religious activities we are on safe ground. We say to ourselves:

“Thank God that I’ve made it home safely tonight. I avoided compromising my values in the workplace. I avoided lying to a client. I held sexual temptation at bay. I didn’t gossip when I had the opportunity. I am safely in my house now. I’ve bolted the door. I’m involved in religion. I’m praying in my house. I’m fasting today. I’m writing out my tithe check. Sin can’t possibly follow me in here. The door is triple bolted. I am safe from the attacks of sin. Thank God that I’m no longer out there having sex with my boyfriend or girlfriend. I’m not stealing, lying, or gossiping. I’m occupied with religion now. Whew! I’m safe.”

Then Jesus takes a cup of ice water and throws it in our face and says: Even when you have triple bolted the door, and you are occupied with giving, praying and fasting, and you think you are finally safe, sin can come under the door and through the little cracks by your window, and through the mortar between the bricks. It follows you right into the safe place of religion. In fact, sin follows you right into the presence of God.

Do you know what makes giving so hard? Or prayer so hard? Or fasting so hard? In the very act of giving, praying or fasting sin clings to us so closely that it follows us right into the presence of God. Do you understand that nothing in our lives is safe from the pervasive impact of sin? If we were safe in giving, if we were safe in praying, if we were safe in fasting, Jesus never would have had to say: Be on your guard when you pray. Watch out. Beware. He would have simply said: When you pray or give, do thus and so. It would have been all positive commands. But Jesus knows that sin clings to us so closely that we drag it into religion and religious activities.

Let me press this point a little bit. So many Christians are self-deceived and we believe that we are safe because we are involved in religious activity, because we are involved on the worship team. Sin certainly

wouldn't be dragged into the worship team, would it? Sin certainly wouldn't be dragged into children's ministry or into ministry to the poor. We wouldn't drag our sin to a prayer meeting, would we?

Jesus is telling us in Matthew 6.1-8 that religion forms a perfect hiding place for sin. Sin is like a coiled snake that hides under the cover of religion. Who would ever suspect that sin is lurking under all this spiritual talk, under all the religiosity? The truth is, friends, some of the scariest people I've ever met are folks whose conversation is loaded with spiritual talk – people filled with anger and ambition, limitless pride, personal agenda, power trips. Truly, some of the most frighteningly evil people I've been around are people whose conversations drip with spiritual phrases and who love the pomp and circumstance of religion.

On a number of occasions, I have had someone take my hand and say something spiritual to me about what they were planning, or why they were doing what they were doing. I've had the experience of having shudders run up my spine because intuitively I had the sense of profound hypocrisy and hidden manipulative agendas. Have you ever had the intuitive sense that behind this veneer of spiritual sounding talk, you are relating to someone who is simply not nice at all?

The fact that sin follows us into the presence of God shows how desperately every one of us needs a Savior. We are not safe anywhere. We are not safe even when we are giving. We are not safe when we are praying. We are not safe when we are fasting. If there is anything that tells us how exceedingly sinful sin is, and how desperately we need a Savior, it is these texts in Matthew 6.

Apart from the renewing work of God in our lives, apart from our lives being reshaped around the gospel, apart from your heart being melted of pride and fear, we are completely hopeless. You and I cannot set ourselves free through religion. It is only the renewing work of God through the born-again experience. It is only the blood of Jesus Christ that washes us. It is only the grace of God that can purify us so that our motives for doing what we are doing are clean motives. If any text indicates to us our need to be saved, it is these verses. Even when we fast, even when we pray, even when we give we are hypocritical.

Jesus is getting us to focus on our motivations for doing these religious activities. By the way, these three acts that Jesus calls attention to giving, praying and fasting. They occur in some form in every religion. They are prominent, of course, in Islam, in the Koran. Certainly, all Jews were expected to give to the poor, to pray and to fast.

And Jesus, evidently, expects his followers to do these things. Notice, he doesn't say: If you give, v2.

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Mt 6:2 "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets,

Rather, he says when you give.

And in v. 5, he doesn't say, if you pray, rather, he says:

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Mt 6:5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites,

And in v. 17, Jesus doesn't say if you fast, rather, he says:

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Mt 6:17 "But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,

We Christians always need to ask ourselves why is it that I'm putting money in the offering plate at church. Why is it that I'm sending a check to charity? Or helping a friend in need. Why do I do that? Why do I wake up in the morning

and pray? Why do I pray out loud in my small group? What's going on in my heart when I pray for a sick person? Why take a day to fast?

Jesus warns us against giving, praying or fasting in order to be seen by others.

V. 1,

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Mt 6:1 “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ in front of others, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Now, people struggle with this and they say: How does this not contradict Matthew 5.16, which says:

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Mt 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

On the one hand, Jesus tells us in Matthew 5 to let people see our good works; and in chapter 6 he says be careful about letting people see your good works. Should our good works be visible or invisible, Jesus? Should we show people what we are doing, or should we hide what we are doing?

I think that these passages can be reconciled by concentrating on our motivation. You see, the key in both cases is what determines your motivation is for showing your good works? In v. 16 the motivation is

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Mt 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

The motive is to bring glory to God – to display how good God is. But the motive in chapter 6 is completely other. The motive in chapter 6 is displaying good works so that people would give glory to us. Jesus is warning us about displaying how good we are.

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Mt 6:1 “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ in front of others, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

This is quite a tightrope. Why am I letting people see this? Is it to bring glory to God, or is it to bring glory to me? Is it so that people will say what a good Savior we have; or is it so people will say what a great person you are?

Back in the 19th century a New Testament scholar named A.B. Bruce caught the balance exactly right when he said,

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We are to show when we are tempted to hide, and we are to hide when we are tempted to show.

So often we hide our Christianity. Why? Because we want people's approval. We want people to like us. A.B. Bruce says: Let your relationship with Christ show when you are tempted to hide. On the other hand, sometimes we want to let our good deeds all hang out. We want them to show. Why? Again, because we want people's approval. A.B. Bruce said hide it when you are tempted to show it.

It all comes down to motives.

Let me make this really practical for you. I have really been assisted in grappling with this text by Darrell Johnson, who teaches pastoral theology at Regent College. Darrell Johnson says there are five facts of life that we can draw from the text.

The first fact of life is this:

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We are all actors in a great drama.

The words of Jesus in Matthew 6 come from the world of acting; from the world of the theatre. Three times he uses the word “hypocrite” – v. 2, 5, and 16.

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Mt 6:2 “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. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

Mt 6:5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

Mt 6:16 “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

The word “hypocrite” comes from the Greek word “hupokritai.” In Greek drama of Jesus’ day, the actors were called “hupokritai.” They were people who were wearing masks. To don a mask and to play a role is the essence of being a hypocrite.

There is a second word that Jesus uses from the world of drama, found in v. 1,

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Mt 6:1 “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ in front of others, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

The Greek word there is “theathanai.” It is where we get the English word “theatre.” So the question of motive is are you just playing a role when you do your religious activity or are you being authentic?

Religious hypocrisy is far from dead. Jesus words spoken 2000 years ago absolutely applies to us 21st century church goers. Why do you attend church?

You know that folks have all kinds of motives for attending church.

- You are dating a woman or a man who attends church and you want them to like you, so you go along.
- You want to be thought of as a good person and good people go to church.
- You want your kids to have some religious education.
- You love God and want to grow in your relationship with him.

We’re all actors in a grand drama, Jesus teaches. The question is are you play-acting a role when it comes to spirituality? Is it just a mask? A veneer? Or if you drilled down, is it real?

Here is the second great fact:

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We are always being watched.

V. 4.

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Mt 6:4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

v. 6,

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Mt 6:6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

v. 18

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Mt 6:18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Hebrews 4.13 tells us that we are always being watched.

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Heb 4:13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

We always have, at the very least, a divine audience. One of the most popular

Psalms in Psalms 139.1-4,

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Ps 139:1 You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.

Ps 139:2 You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

Ps 139:3 You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

Ps 139:4 Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.

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Ps 139:11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,"

Ps 139:12 even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

There is no amount of darkness that we can hide ourselves in that God doesn't see through. There is no secret file on our computer that God doesn't know. There is no secret thought, attitude, no word that we speak that God is not aware of. There is no rationalization, no defense mechanism or self justification that God does not know. The thought of God seeing us is at once both terrifying and amazingly comforting.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones, who was one of the greatest Bible preachers of the 20th century, said this:

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God sees it all. He knows your heart; other people do not. You can deceive them, and you can persuade them that you are quite selfless; but God knows your heart. You said our Lord to the Pharisees one afternoon, "You are they who justify yourselves before men; but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

Now this is a fundamental principle for the whole of our life. I sometimes feel that there is no better way of living and trying to live, the holy life than to just be constantly reminding ourselves of this simple fact. When we wake up in the morning we should immediately remind ourselves and recollect that we are in the presence of God. It is not a bad thing to say to ourselves before we go any further: "Throughout the whole of this day, everything I do, and say, and attempt, and think, and imagine, is going to be done under the eye of God. He is going to be with me; he sees everything; he knows everything. There is nothing I can do or attempt but God is fully aware of it all."

"You, God, see me" would revolutionize our lives if we always did this...For the one who starts with the true realization that God sees all will soon be seen flying to Christ and his cross, and pleading to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

How would your life change, friend, if you lived with the realization that God sees you?

Now it is important to remember who this God is that sees us. He is not a divine policeman waiting to pounce on you, looking for places to criticize you, or accuse you, or oppress you. The God who sees you is a God who is constantly looking for opportunities to bless you. God is watching so he can protect you, provide for you, influence you towards a better, freer, more satisfying life. He is your Father in heaven. Note, Jesus repeatedly says:

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Mt 6:4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

v. 6,

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Mt 6:6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

v. 18,

SLIDE

Mt 6:18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

The one who watches us all day long, who knows our thoughts before they are formed is our Father in heaven.

Here is fact Number Three:

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We all want to be watched.

We all crave attention. We all desire to be noticed. Even shy people desire that their actions be noticed. The desire to be noticed is not wrong. We were made

to be noticed. We were made to be paid attention to. Children express this desire to be noticed in a completely unself-conscious way.

My granddaughter, Naomi, who is three years old regularly says to me: “Papa, watch me. Watch this.” And then she will jump up in the air and do a little spin. “Watch me, Papa. Look at what I can do.” She stood up on our coffee table at age 2 and said, “Tada!”

I always say: “Naomi that was a wonderful spin! Did you learn that in dance class? That was a wonderful spin! I don’t think I’ve ever seen anybody spin as good as you spin.”

As adults we don’t say, “Watch me! Watch me!” But we feel the same thing that children do.

This leads to the fourth great fact:

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Since we are all actors in a great drama, for whom will you perform?

This is the crucial issue determining your motivation. For whom are you performing? We can perform for others. How many of us here still struggle to gain the admiration and approval of parents, who have always been withholding

of praise. Do you know, you can be 60 years old and still want to have your father or mother say: That was a great spin! You've been really successful in your marriage, your family, your life. Many of us crave the approval of your parents.

Or we want the approval of other Christians, and this spills over into religion. Haven't you ever prayed so that other people would say: "Oh, that was a good prayer that you just prayed." Everyone involved in spiritual activity faces this great temptation. I need to ask myself this every week when I get up to preach: Who am I doing this for? Is this so that people at the end will say: That was great! Who is the audience? Who am I seeking to please? Whose praise do I want? Worship leaders face this all the time. Who is the audience that I'm performing for? Is it the congregation?

Haven't you ever found yourself involved in some spiritual activity and wondered in your mind: I wonder what this person whose approval I want thinks of what I'm doing? If you say no, you are a liar.

Jesus says in v. 2,

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Mt 6:2 "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. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

Historically, they probably weren't announcing their giving with trumpets. Jesus may actually have been talking about the notion of blowing your own horn when you give. Giving so that others will see it, or that your name might be on a building at Ohio State, or you can get your picture in the paper, or get an award.

But this is a subtle thing. You know, most of us are not as showy as all of that. Who we are performing for is not as obvious as never thinking about getting our name on a plaque or avoiding religious show. Sinful motivations are so much more subtle than that.

I recall many years ago meeting some folks who were going to be involved in missions work in a poor country overseas. They told me the way their mission agency worked. They said they weren't going to solicit money to carry on this project. They were just going to pray. The whole project was based on faith giving. God simply would have to answer their needs. There would be no pledge cards, no meetings.

I thought to myself, "How spiritual. How wonderful. No advertisements. Just relying on God to meet their needs."

But then I noticed that every time these folks talked with someone in the church they told people that they were involved in missions work and that they were

simply going to be relying on God to meet their needs because they believed in faith giving.

Do you see how subtle this business is of performing for others – to try to get people to be impressed by our spirituality? And even if you can shut out other people so that you are not performing before the audience of others, even if you can push that away and you say to yourself, “I’m really not focused on others when I pray in public, or when I give. I’m past that. I try really hard to not blow my own horn or advertise. I hate self-promotion. I hate hype in religion. I run in the other direction from that,” you can still be like the Pharisee in Matthew 18 who prayed to himself as he looked at the tax collector. The Pharisee said, “I thank God that I’m not like that guy! I thank God that I don’t trumpet my righteousness. I don’t advertise my giving. I give in cash. I never write a check so that anyone, even in the accounting department of the church, might know. I refuse to give that way. I never pray in public. I only pray in my room and in secret.”

And all the while you are patting yourself on the back, you are committing the sin of self-righteousness. As you review in your heart your acts of righteousness, as you bolster your self-esteem before your own eyes, you are saying to yourself: Aren’t I great?

Jesus wants you to not only shut out the opinions of others regarding your acts of righteousness, he wants you to shut yourself out. To be done with yourself altogether. V. 3,

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Mt 6:3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

When you give, don't announce your giving, in other words, to anyone including yourself. This is a great spiritual discipline to give and walk away. It is a discipline to say "no" to yourself when you start reviewing your acts of righteousness. How did I do this week? How did I do this month? It is a discipline of the heart to not keep your own records of your acts of righteousness, but to be deliberately self-forgetful.

That is what Jesus is talking about in the judgment called the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25. The righteous, the ones who are going to inherit the kingdom, are the self-forgetful ones. We read in Matthew 25:37-40,

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Mt 25:37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?

Mt 25:38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?

Mt 25:39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

Mt 25:40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

In other words, we aren't even aware of all the good we do, the righteous say. We don't keep a record of it. We don't review our goodness with a smug self-satisfaction. We do what we do and we let it go to God.

Do you practice that kind of discipline of your heart, friends? We can do our acts of righteousness for others. We can do it for ourselves to review for our own satisfaction, so that we may consider ourselves to be good people. Or we can do our acts of righteousness for God, unto God, for God's glory.

The only way I've ever found to be able to do this is to simply fix my heart on Jesus and to look at him when I pray. I have to talk to him and not to the others in the room including myself. I look at him when I fast and when I get done doing something like when I preach. I take the message that I'm doing and at the end of the sermon I give it to him – all the praise, all the blame, everything good and bad. Here is the work of my hands.

Friends, let me commend this to you. Whatever you do over the course of a day, release it to God. In the moment release it to God and at the end of the day, as you review your day, release your activity to God: My Father in heaven, here is the fruit of my labor. Here is what I've done today. I offer it

to you. Forgive me for the defects. Take the glory. If there is anything good in it, may it be unto you.

And here is the fifth and final great fact:

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We all get the reward we seek.

When we give, pray or fast to be seen by others, we get our payment in full right then, in that moment. The Greek for “they will have their reward” is actually a technical, commercial term. It literally means “payment in full.” If you pray and the design of your prayer is that other people will say “that was a great prayer. You worded that so well. You are so poetic. You are so spiritual,” Jesus says in that moment, God stamps that prayer, “Payment In Full.” You’ve got your reward. You’ve been paid. Your goal was to impress people. They were impressed. You were paid. You get the reward you seek.

If the goal of you leading worship is to have other people say, “You are a great guitar player” or “You have a wonderful voice,” – payment in full. You get the reward you seek.

If your audience is yourself, so that you can experience self-satisfaction and smugness about your own spirituality, Jesus says, "Payment in full."

Whatever reward you are after, that is what you will get. If the reward you are seeking comes from God alone, then Jesus says that there is good news for you. V. 4,

SLIDE

Mt 6:4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

v. 6,

SLIDE

Mt 6:6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

v. 18,

SLIDE

Mt 6:18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

What is the reward? Certainly, if I'm seeking an answer to prayer from God, that would be a reward. Certainly, if I'm seeking to alleviate a need through giving, then when that need is alleviated, that is a reward. Certainly, if I'm seeking a break-through in fasting, when the break-through comes, that is a reward. But I

believe the ultimate reward is that God becomes my portion. As I seek God, I focus on God and I make him my only audience and I get more of God.

The psalmist prays in Psalm 17.14,

SLIDE

Ps 17:14 By your hand save me from such people, LORD, from those of this world whose reward is in this life. May what you have stored up for the wicked fill their bellies; may their children gorge themselves on it, may there be leftovers for their little ones.

But I don't want my reward in this life. I don't want my reward from others or myself. What I desire is what the psalmist prayed in Psalm 73.26,

SLIDE

Ps 73:26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

How can you be healed of your hypocrisy?

- Recognize that you are always acting in a drama and act with integrity.
- Acknowledge that you are always being watched by God your Father. Act with the sense that God's eye is on me this very moment.
- Admit that you do want to be watched. You want to be approved of. You want to be noticed.
- Shut out the applause of others and the satisfaction of your own approval.

- Seek your reward from God above.

Play life before an audience of one - namely God. Let's pray.

Healing Our Hypocrisy

Rich Nathan

April 1-2, 2006

Life As It Was Meant To Be Series

Matthew 6.1-6; 16-18

I. Examining Our Motives (Hebrews 4.12)

II. Warning About Religion

III. Showing And Hiding (Matthew 5.16, 6.1)

IV. Five Great Facts Of Life

A. We Are All Actors In A Great Drama

B. We Are Always Being Watched (Psalm 139)

C. We All Want To Be Watched

D. Since We Are All Actors, For Whom Will You Perform?

E. We All Get The Reward We Seek