Whitewashed Tombs – Part Five

# Hypocrisy

# (Matthew 15:7-8)

Good morning. Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. I’m so glad to have you with us today as we wrap up our series called “Whitewashed Tombs.” If you brought your Bible with you would you open it to Matthew chapter 15? Today we’re going to let God’s Word speak to us about how to deal with a particular type of person that many of us love but who quite honestly can be very difficult to deal with.

In fact, if I could get some participation, I wonder how many of you know someone that can be a hypocrite? Would you just raise your hand for a minute, not elbowing your neighbor, no pointing, but just raising your hand?

Now, how many of you would say that you’re sitting next to that hypocrite or maybe you can see that hypocrite? Well, this time don’t raise your hand, but just pretend like you don’t know what I’m talking about, because here’s what I mean, here’s what I’m getting at, the biggest complaint that I hear from non-Christians about Christians is that they’re all a bunch of hypocrites. And so, I wonder how many of you would admit that you can be just a little bit hypocritical at times? Go ahead and raise your hands if you can be hypocritical, help me out if you can be hypocritical. Are there just a few of you that are going to be honest this morning?

You see, what the Holy Spirit has been revealing is that we can all be hypocritical at times. If we’re not careful we all can become like those whom Jesus called “Whitewashed Tombs”. In fact, let’s look at what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 15. He was speaking to some Pharisees and teachers of the Law of Moses and look at what he called them? He said,

“You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: "'These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me” (Matthew 15:7-8).

Now, you and I, we may call them frauds or fakes, but they’re hypocrites. They talk the talk but they don’t walk the walk. That’s why Jesus said, “They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.” These are those who claim to know God, but their life doesn’t reflect the character of the one whom they say they are following. And it was these guys that Jesus called “Whitewashed Tombs” because they were spotless on the outside, but on the inside, they were selfish, wicked, and corrupt.

In verse seven, Jesus called them out, he confronted them and he said, “You hypocrites!” And this Greek word literally means to be an actor, someone who’s participating in a performance, someone who would go backstage, put on a mask and come out pretending to be someone else. You and I may call them two-faced, because they say one thing and do another.

Unfortunately, most of us have been hurt by someone who’s a hypocrite because they weren’t being truthful; they weren’t who you thought they were and they betrayed you and let you down. Maybe for you it was someone who presented themselves as a godly person, you know they always talked about spiritual things, but then you discover that at home they’re verbally abusive, given to drunkenness, fits of rage, and are full of greed and materialism.

Or maybe it’s that one person in your prayer group who’s always full of gossip, picking everyone apart, tearing them down and who seems to be envious of everybody.

For others of you, it could be that kid at school or on your team who claims to know Jesus but brags about how they cheated on their test last week and got an a “A”. Or how they were partying all weekend or their sexual exploits with miscellaneous partners.

Or maybe it might be that guy or gal that you know at the grocery store, the gas station, or McDonald’s who claims to be a follower of Christ but cusses like a sailor and tells crude jokes all the time.

Well, what I want to do this morning is talk about how we are to respond to them in a loving way. And so, first of all, we’re going to look at how we identify hypocrisy, and then how Jesus responded to it, and how we should respond to it? And so, number one how do we identify hypocrisy.

## 1. How do we identify it?

And the first thing we need to do is try to discover why they’re acting that way? You know, if they’re presenting themselves one way and yet living another way, we want to be able to discern why, because the why helps us determine how to respond. The reason why they’re acting that way helps us to determine how we should respond as followers of Christ.

For example, maybe they don’t really know Jesus. And so, instead of being a hypocrite they’ve just never been spiritually born again. In fact, the Bible talks about this, we can read this in first John chapter 3. The apostle tells us very clearly,

“No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are…” (1 John 3:9-10).

In other words, just because they go to church and claim to be a Christian, doesn’t mean that spiritually they’ve ever been born again. And so, maybe they’ve never been genuinely transformed by the Holy Spirit. In fact, even Jesus mentioned this in Matthew chapter 7, he said a good tree cannot bear bad fruit and therefore it’s not what you say but what you do. He said,

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father…” (Matthew 7:21).

And so, just because they talk the talk, just because they claim to follow Jesus, doesn’t mean that they’ve experienced the new birth the kingdom requires. This person isn’t a hypocrite, they’re just someone who needs a personal encounter with Jesus, because they haven’t experienced the grace of God.

And then again, maybe they just don’t know any better, maybe their new in their faith and they haven’t been taught how they’re supposed to live. In fact, the apostle Paul was dealing with this very same problem with the church in Corinth. He wrote to them saying,

“Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly — mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men…” (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

In other words, they may have been forgiven, they may have been filled with the Holy Spirit, but they haven’t really grown and matured spiritually. Paul says that they’re, “infants in Christ” and so they don’t need correcting, they need “milk and not solid food”, they need to be taught because they just don’t know any better.

And then, on the other hand, maybe they do know better, but they’re still disobeying God. This is the hypocrite, because they know better, but they dishonor God with the way that they live. That’s why the apostle Paul encouraged the church in Rome saying,

“Don’t let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness” (Romans 6:12-13).

In other words, Paul says, don’t presume upon the grace of God as some sort of excuse to live anyway you want. And yet, when people slip into a spirit of hypocrisy, they’ll make all sorts of excuses. In fact, I’ve heard people defend their addiction to pornography by saying, “It’s not anybody else’s business, it’s not hurting anybody, and if my wife were meeting my needs then I wouldn’t have to look at this anyway.” And so, they resign themselves to hoping for grace and what started out as justification or rationalization becomes pure blown hypocrisy.

And so, what are we to do, how are we to respond to those who’ve genuinely encountered Jesus Christ and yet continue to disobey God? How do we deal with those people who know what is right but don’t live according to God’s truth? Well, number two, we’re going to look at how Jesus responded to hypocrisy.

## 2. How did Jesus respond to it?

What I’ve discovered is that Jesus confronted hypocrisy head on, but he didn’t always respond the same way. And so, my prayer is that we can learn from him so that we don’t push people away from God, not only hurting them, but hurting our witness in the world as well. And so, in Matthew chapter 23, we find Jesus encountering some Pharisees who knew the truth but did not live it and he called them out saying,

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel” (Matthew 23:23-24).

In other words, he said, “You are nit-picking, you’re drawing attention to the little things, but you’re missing the important things, the big things that really matter.” You see, they were tithing out of their garden, not just their crops, not their livelihood, but down to the very spices they put on their food for their meals. And I think that sometimes we as Christians fall into the same trap. You know, we start nitpicking others, gossiping and sinning in the way that we relate to others, maybe looking down on the way that they dress, or the type of music they listen to, or even what version of Bible they’re using. But the truth of the matter is that God looks at the heart and not the externals. And so, we don’t want to hurt someone or insult someone in the family of God by confronting things that are matters of preference and not substance.

In fact, let’s look at another example of Jesus confronting someone in John’s gospel. In chapter 8 we find the account of a woman who was caught in the act of adultery. Now, is that a big thing or a little thing? That’s a big thing because the Bible says to…

“Flee from sexual immorality. (Why? Because) All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18).

And so, the Pharisees brought this woman to Jesus, she’s guilty of a big sin, she was caught in the act of adultery, and John tells us that they made her stand before Jesus. In verse five they said to him,

“Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” (John 8:4-5).

Now, like I said this was a big sin, and so these guys were intent on killing this woman with rocks just as the Law stated. But we discover that Jesus responded differently than they were anticipating. Instead, he responded with grace and truth, he didn’t belittle her, he didn’t condemn her, and the Bible says that Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. Meanwhile the Pharisees kept questioning him, pressuring him for a response, until finally he straightened up and said to them,

“If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again, he stooped down and wrote on the ground” (John 8:7-8).

Now, we don’t know what he wrote on the ground, but many scholars think that it might’ve been the sins of these self-righteous and holy men of God because the Bible says in verse nine that,

“At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said” (John 8:9-11).

In grace he responded to the woman, “Neither do I condemn you.” And then in truth he said, “Go now and leave your life of sin.” In other words, “Stop sinning, don’t do it anymore, but go and be free because there’s a better way” And so, he confronted the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and this woman who had become their victim, exhibit “A”, and he responded with grace and truth because he had a heart to restore a lost sinner.

I believe that if you and I are going to get this right, we need to follow Jesus example. And so, let’s just say that there is someone in your life right now whom you love dearly and they know the truth of God but they’re not living it. This is probably most of us if not all of us and this was the situation that the apostle Paul addressed in his letter to the Galatians. He encouraged the believers there saying,

“If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:1-2).

And so, Jesus example and this Word inspired by the Holy Spirit encourages us to respond with grace and truth with the goal of restoration. And so, in the remainder of our time together, number three, we’re going to consider how we should respond to hypocrisy. We’re going to look at principles from this passage of Scripture that we can apply to our lives today.

## 3. How should we respond to it?

Now, obviously we want to be careful because we want to get this right. Therefore, we want to enter into this prayerfully, because our heart matters and our approach matters. And so, the first thing we learn from these words inspired by the Holy Spirit to the church in Galatia is found in verse one. I want to read it this second time from the New Living Translation because I believe it amplifies the meaning. In Galatians chapter 6, the apostle Paul said,

“Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path…” (Galatians 6:1, NLT).

And so, our desire is to bring them back, to restore them, and to make them whole again. But our spiritual enemy’s intention is to “steal, kill, and destroy”, that was the intention of the Pharisees, but Jesus came so that we “may have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10). And therefore, our goal is to restore, our desire is to bring this one who has been overcome by some sin back to God’s original purpose. And so, we want to do it gently and humbly, because we’re not the judge, we’re the guide, and we want to help lead them back to a better way of freedom and truth.

In other words, our goal in confrontation is not to be right, but it’s to help them be right with God. It’s not to exalt ourselves, but to humbly come alongside of them, helping them back onto the right path, just as we would hope that they might help us. And so, we restore our brother or sister gently and cautiously, because the apostle Paul warns us at the end of verse one,

“Be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself” (Galatians 6:1, NLT).

In other words, we need to be cautious, because the moment we put ourselves in that position of one who’s correcting, we become vulnerable to pride and pride always comes before a fall. In fact, the apostle Paul said the same thing to the church in Corinth, he said,

“If you think you’re standing firm, be careful that you don't fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

And so, when you help someone back onto the right path, you do it carefully because the moment you think you are better, more secure in your faith, or more mature, you are opening yourself to the lies of the enemy. That’s when you’re most vulnerable to do the same thing that you are calling someone else out on; and that’s why we have to be very cautious and we need to be fully committed to see them through.

You see, the problem is that sometimes they won’t receive correction, they won’t listen, and that’s why Jesus says,

“But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses” (Matthew 18:16, NLT).

And so, Jesus says, you bring in support, one or two other people to help them see that this really is a big issue, and then you lovely help that person back onto the right path. If they still don't listen, after you've come to them one on one, and you've brought a couple of people that are lovingly praying and desiring restoration, then you take it to some form of leadership in the church. Jesus said,

“If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church…” (Matthew 18:17, NLT).

In other words, you might take it before the pastor or a leadership team, and this is why you need to be committed, because this is difficult.

And unfortunately, this is where you may have to redefine your relationship. Where you might have to say, “I love you but you can’t continue behaving this way, coming to church and serving or playing on the worship team and acting like everything’s okay. We can’t keep hanging out, having lunch together, fellowshipping with one another when you’re acting like this.” Its laying down boundaries, there’s a line that you can’t cross, and that’s how you confront with the heart to restore. It’s a complete commitment to the well-being of that person that we love and therefore Galatians tells us in verse two,

“Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2, NLT).

In this way, as we confront, we’re committed to carry each other’s burdens. We’re here to see them through, to get them back onto the right path, and so we’re committed because we love them and we’ll be there for them no matter what. But we define that relationship according to the Word of God, because this is how Christ defined that relationship, and this is how we should respond to hypocrisy. Not with judgment or condemnation, but loving someone enough to lift them up out of the mire and burden of their sins.

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