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## *The Revolutionary Disciple: Authentic Worship*

Matthew 6:1-8; 16-18

Our pastoral team attended a conference in Post Falls, Idaho two weeks ago. We knew we were in Idaho when the Senior Pastor came to the Question/Answer session dressed in full camo... from head to toe. And to underscore the point, his pulpit is made out of antlers. But it's working. This church has something like 5,000 people in what they call "Home Groups." For them, "church" is primarily what happens in those groups during the week, not what happens on Sunday morning. In fact, he had a warning about turning Sunday mornings into a "show." "If you build your church around "the Show," he said, "you'd better make sure that every week, your Show is more and more awesome. And you'd better understand that, when someone else comes along with a better show, people will desert you for the new thing."

I hope we don't view what we are doing here as a "Show." But it is a provocative question, isn't it, this matter of our motives behind the way we worship God? Today, we continue our study of what it means to be a revolutionary disciple of Jesus. Last week, He told us to love our enemies. This week, he tells us not to be phony worshipers.

This is the city of Sephorris. It was built by the Romans about 7 miles from Nazareth. As with every great Roman city, it had a theater. In fact, this theater was built around the time Jesus was a boy. It is quite possible that Joseph, the craftsman, and his apprentice son, Jesus, served on the construction crew of this project. Imagine that! The Jews were well aware of the Roman obsession with theater. They also knew what the actors were called. Do you? "Hupacritase." Hypocrites. "Hypocrite" was the word for an actor... the person behind the mask on stage entertaining spectators.

Guess who changed the meaning of this word? Yep. Jesus is the first person to use "hypocrite" the way we use it today... to mean "phony" or "inauthentic;" someone pretending to be something for the sake of their spectators. Jesus hated hypocrisy, especially in religion. He was relentless in his criticism of those who pretended to be one thing on the outside... and were, in fact, something else entirely in their hearts.

Here, Jesus turns his attention to hypocritical worship. Verse 1 is really the heading: "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen

by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven". Do you know what the key phrase is here? "...to be seen by men." The word in the Greek is theathenai. Does that look like a word you know? "Theater." Literally it means, "to be theater to." "When you are performing righteous deeds—acts of worship—be careful not to put on a religious act to be seen by others..." And then he offers three illustrations.

First, ostentatious giving: "Be careful when you give to the needy that you do not do it in order to receive honor from men." Remember, this was a culture that tithed. The first ten percent of everything grown or made belonged to God. A good Jew would never think about spending the tithe on themselves. It was stealing from God! And beyond that, they also gave "offerings"... extra gifts that went to help the poor. To be generous in the Lord's work was considered honorable... to the point that, when someone gave a particularly large gift, he might be invited to the front of the synagogue and praised by the rabbi, literally, with trumpets sounding as he walked forward.

Just imagine if I said, "Everyone, I want you to know that John Smith gave a gift of \$100,000." John, come on up here so we can honor you." Awkward, right? But it happened. And Jesus says, "If you give ostentatiously, for the purpose of drawing attention to yourself, you are a hypocrite... an actor putting on a show. Whatever honor you get from your spectators had better satisfy you, because you will get no reward from God."

Then he goes on: "But my authentic disciples give to show how much they love the God who has given them everything. They give to please Him... so they give secretly. They don't even let the left hand know what the right hand has pulled out of the pocket. And when you give that way, you bask in God's pleasure."

Next he speaks of ostentatious prayer. In Israel, when we visit the Western Wall in January, we will see very ostentatious, very public displays of prayer. [[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsX5t\\_wYoYM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsX5t_wYoYM)] And that was the case in Jesus' time, too. A man would pray in the middle of the street so as to draw attention to himself. Others would point and say, "Look at that holy person." But Jesus says, "If you pray ostentatiously, for the purpose of drawing attention to yourself, you are a hypocrite... an actor putting on a show. Whatever honor you get from your spectators had better satisfy you, because you will get no reward from God."

And he goes on: "But my authentic disciples pray because they want a deeper relationship with their Heavenly Father. They want to talk with and hear from a God who isn't interested in long-winded prayers. He wants genuine conversation with them. So when it is time to pray, they go into the supply closet, lock the door, and spend time alone with God... and bask in His presence and pleasure."

Finally, ostentatious fasting: Fasting is giving up something, often food, for a period of time in order to center your heart upon the Lord. It is an act of sacrifice and self-control that focuses your spiritual attention. There were all kinds of fasts in the Jewish religion, and if someone wanted to be noticed for fasting he would put ashes on his head—like a mourner did—so that spectators would say, “Oh look, that person is fasting. He must be a holy person. Look how miserable he is!” But Jesus says, “If you fast ostentatiously, for the purpose of drawing attention to yourself, you are a hypocrite... an actor putting on a show. Whatever honor you get from your spectators had better satisfy you, because you will get no reward from God.”

And he goes on: “But my authentic disciples fast because they are learning to control their appetites and focus on their relationship with God. So when it’s time to fast, they don’t mourn! They wash their face, put on their favorite cologne and comb their hair so that they look fresh... joyful! So that no one who sees them will have any idea they are sacrificing something in order to focus on God.”

So, in summary, Jesus says, “My revolutionary disciples are authentic, not ostentatious. In the way they give and pray and fast—in these acts of worship and others—they are not trying to impress the onlookers. They are trying to be noticed and honored and rewarded by God alone. So I want you to practice your generosity and prayer and fasting in secret so that only God notices.”

But, you might ask, does this mean we never pray out loud together in worship or LifeGroups? Not necessarily. Later on in Matthew, we find Jesus praying out loud in public several times. Does this mean that we never witness to others with our giving? Not necessarily. In Acts 4, the early church members sold all their possessions and laid the money at the disciples’ feet, publicly.

The issue is not secrecy; it is audience. If we give so that others will notice, if we pray so that others will be impressed, if we fast so that others will honor our spirituality, if we do any acts of righteousness for the purpose of being seen by others... then we are performing for the wrong audience. Like “hypocritase”—hypocrites—we are seeking the praise and applause of onlookers. And when we do, the only important audience of One sits back and says, “I hope you enjoyed your applause, because that’s all you are going to get.” Jesus says, “I don’t want ostentatious worshipers. I want authentic worshipers.”

That’s the meaning of this passage. But I had the hardest time writing this sermon. Do you know why? Because, it seems almost entirely irrelevant to our culture. We aren’t a culture that tithes, or prays regularly, or sacrifices things to honor God. We aren’t exactly overwhelmed with ostentatious givers in our church. Maybe it’s because we don’t put donor’s names on buildings or hang donor banners from rafters, but I don’t spend a lot of time going around to people saying, “You know, you really are giving too much; I want you to give less and let someone else do their part.”

Because, we aren't a culture that believes in tithing... much less extra offerings. Did you know that the total percentage of giving in the Old Testament was actually 23.3% and the example of giving offered in the New Testament was 100%. The average of giving here is less than 3%, and hundreds of us give nothing. And whenever we do have a stewardship campaigns, every time we have people who turn in blank pledge cards so that it will look like they're pledging something when, in fact, they are not.

We claim to be followers of Christ and to believe that all we have is a gift from the Lord Jesus, but with some notable exceptions most in this church are anything but ostentatious givers. We throw God a few crumbs if there are any left over after we have met all our needs and our wants.

And we aren't exactly ostentatious pray-ers, either. I have never had to go to someone in this church and say, "You know, all that praying you are doing down in the park—those prayers for our city and for the unsaved people of Gig Harbor—it is a little over the top. Maybe you could tone it down a bit." Again, with some notable exceptions, we are a church of people who can hardly find time to pray. We've got plenty of time for emails, plenty of time for texts, plenty of time for Facebook, plenty of time for the Seahawks... but to actually view our time of talking with God regularly and authentically and intensely as a priority of life... not hardly.

And we sure aren't ostentatious fast-ers. I am not aware of anyone who fasts on a regular basis, myself included. Of course, those who are fasting according to Jesus' principles aren't likely to be advertising the fact, are they? Maybe I'm wrong, but I suspect that few of us regularly give up food or TV or Facebook or anything as a part of a spiritual discipline to quiet our lives and focus on the Lord.

As I reflected on this passage, I found myself thinking, "I wish my problem, as a pastor of this flock, was to discourage ostentatious spiritual displays! To confront the overly generous, overly prayerful, overly sacrificial people because they are not doing it with the right motives or for the right audience." But the fact is, as a church, we can't even get to Jesus' core teaching of authenticity, because we haven't gotten past his first word of teaching in this area. What is the first word of teaching that Jesus offers in every area of authentic worship? When! "When you give" (verse 2)... "when you pray"... (verse 5)... "when you fast" (verse 16.) The assumption of Jesus is that his disciples are generous givers, are fervent pray-ers, are regular fast-ers. That was their culture. That was the expectation of all who called themselves Jews.

But our expectation, our culture, our assumption is so much more modest. If we show up at church once or twice a month, if we throw ten bucks in the plate, if we say grace at dinner, if we give up chocolate for Lent... that is what passes for ostentation in today's Christian world. In truth, far from being ostentatious about

our faith, we are a Christian culture that wants to blend in. We don't want to stand out! We want to hide our faith and we choose practices of living and giving and worshipping that look very little different from the world around us.

As I said, I hardly knew what to do with this text because hundreds of us do not care to be generous or prayerful or sacrificial and that is the painful truth. Our discipleship as a whole hasn't reached a point where these habits matter to us. And when a preacher points out that Jesus actually talked about these things, a lot, it's easier to get mad at the preacher than to listen to Jesus and to ask the hard question, "Am I being faithful in all the ways that Jesus, my Lord, calls me to be faithful?"

I mentioned my struggle this week to an elder and he saw a bright side to it. "When I coach kids," he said, "it is always harder to correct a bad habit than it is to teach them to do it right in the first place. Maybe this is a chance for the Holy Spirit to teach us how to do these things right in the first place." All right, then... let's develop Christ-honoring worship habits together.

We are in a month of covenant. Last week, we handed out 1,200 of these journals challenging you to read daily through the Sermon on the Mount and write down what Jesus is teaching you about being a faithful disciple. In addition, each Wednesday, we are calling the church to fast and pray, breaking our fast together at the Table. I hope hundreds of us will go without food for a few hours so that we can focus on our hearts on God. But maybe you need to give up something else. As a staff, we are going to fast from email from 8:00am to noon on Wednesdays. Maybe you need to fast from email or texting or—God forbid—Facebook for four hours and use that time to focus on the Lord.

Then on November 23, we are going to celebrate Covenant Sunday. On that day, each of us will take a Covenant card and fill in the specific changes in our behavior to which we believe Jesus is calling us. We will put it in a self-addressed envelope and turn it in during worship. No one else will read it. Only the Lord and you will know what you have written. Then, later we will mail it back to you to hold you accountable for your covenant with Jesus. Maybe you will covenant to be a more authentic giver or pray-er or fast-er. That's between you and the Lord.

You know the tough thing about a message like this? It's gonna make people mad. I suspect it did when Jesus preached it. I'm sure it will today. But you know what? I can't worry about that. The fact is Jesus talked about these things because they were a deep matter of the heart. He didn't want phony, ostentatious hypocrites; He wanted authentic, heart-felt followers... and He still does. He wants people who love Him and obey Him and want to worship Him with their hearts and lives.

If you are convicted by these words, good; listen to the Holy Spirit and do what He tells you to do. And if you are angry, be careful. You might find yourself resisting the deep work that the Holy Spirit wants to do in you. In the end, you

don't have to make me happy, you don't have to impress the elders or your friends or your pew-mates... all that does is make you a hypocrite. In the end, what you want is to play your life for an audience of One, don't you? It is God's attention, God's praise, God's delight and—yes Jesus said—God's reward that matters. And that's all.

## **Sermon Questions**

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
  
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
  
- **DIG DEEPER**
  1. Pastor Mark entitled this sermon, "Authentic Worship." Does that title make sense to you? What is it that makes our worship authentic?
  
  2. Jesus speaks of several specific areas of worship: giving, prayer and fasting. He seems to assume that his followers will do all these things. How would you rate your own worship of Jesus in each of those three areas?
  
  3. Jesus teaches that we ought to give, pray and fast quietly. Does this mean that no one should ever know that we give, that we should never pray out loud, that we should never share with another person that we are fasting? How do we witness with our giving, praying and fasting... while not making it a show?