**Truth and Hypocrisy**

Based on [Matthew 21:23-32](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt21.23-32)

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The central teaching of Jesus today is the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the necessity of aligning yourself publically with the truth. It is a sober splash of cold water to realize that there are evil men who, in the interest of saving face and preserving power for themselves, refuse to turn and face the truth. First, a scene where Pharisees and elders of the people play the perfect politician. Refusing to give answer to a question from Jesus, not because they didn’t know the answer, but because of how it will “spin.” Second, Jesus tells a parable about a man with two sons, showing that faith is shown in how one responds to the truth.

First, the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. This episode gives us a good understanding of what true hypocrisy looks like. It’s not simply failing to practice what you preach. It is not simply expecting of others what you do not expect of yourself—though these both apply. Here true hypocrisy is exposed for what it is, the worship of perception at the expense of the truth.

**23**And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” **24**Jesus answered them, “I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. **25**The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?” And they discussed it among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ **26**But if we say, ‘From man,’ we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet.” **27**So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

The amazing thing about what happens in this exchange is not just how deftly Jesus handles the Pharisees and Elders. The amazing thing is how allergic these men are to simply speaking the truth. “Speaking the truth” doesn’t even occur to them. Jesus asks them where John the Baptists authority to preach comes from. As religious leaders of their people, they should have consulted the Scriptures, the source and authority for all truth. There they would have found these words of Isaiah, “**The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight**.” That was a prophecy about John who was to come. Perhaps they wouldn’t have understood the prophecy; but the point is that when someone asks a man of God where someone’s authority comes from, the answer is simple…it comes from God and must be obeyed, or it comes from man and it is illegitimate.

The Pharisees are exposed here as hypocrites because they do not regard the truth in deciding how to answer the question Jesus puts to them. Instead they worry about how their answers will “spin” with the public. “**If we say John’s authority is from heaven, Jesus will make us look bad. If we say John’s authority is from man, the crowds will oppose us.”** These men are religious leaders of the people, and it doesn’t occur to them—it doesn’t even occur to them—to attempt to answer the question truthfully.

When Jesus is about to be sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate, he says “**I have come to bear witness to the truth**.” Pilate says, “**What is truth?” “What is truth**?” One thing you’ll find when you read the account of Jesus’ own trial and death is how little Pilate cared about whether Jesus was truly guilty or not. In fact, Pilate it seems, believed that Jesus was innocent…that the truth was he did nothing wrong to deserve death. But when the crowds began to should crucify him, crucify him. Scripture says, “**From then on Pilate sought to release [Jesus], but the Jews cried out, “I you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar’…So he delivered him over to them to be crucified**” (John 19:12, 16). “What is truth?” To Pilate the truth is irrelevant. “*What does truth have to do with whether or not I will decide to crucify you…the truth is what the people will believe*.”

Pilate was a Roman Governor, who is now dead, but his spirit lives on. The Pharisees as a sect are no more, but their spirit lives on. It is the spirit of hypocrisy. The word “hypocrite”--a word that Jesus uses to describe the Pharisees—the word “hypocrite” comes from the Greek word *hypocrites* (hupokrites) which means *an actor*. An actor is one who tries to deceive you in to thinking they are somebody else.

Scripture talks about the spirit of truth and the spirit of deception (1 John 4:6). Contrast the spirit of Pilate and the Pharisees, with the spirit of Paul who says of himself and the other ministers of the Word, “**But we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God**” (2 Cor 4:2).

After Jesus exposes their hypocrisy, he drives home the point by telling this parable that teaches the importance of aligning oneself with the truth:

**28**“What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ **29**And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. **30**And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. **31**Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. **32**For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

The prostitutes and tax collectors once refused to align themselves with the truth; they rejected the commands of God and did what was right in their own eyes. But then when John the Baptist came, they saw that he was from God, calling them to repentance and pointing them to the Christ. When they saw John, they repented, changed their minds, the prostitutes stopped their whoring, the tax collectors left their booths and followed John and Jesus. They are not hypocrites because, though they once didn’t perceive the truth, but when they did they repented. They are like the first son who said “I will not, but afterward changed his mind and went.”

On the contrary, the Pharisees and all hypocrites then and today, are those who say they align themselves with the truth; and profess to obey Gods commands and do what is right before the Lord. But when John the Baptist came, a prophet of God, calling them to repentance and pointing them to Christ, they refused to go to him. When they saw John, they did not change their minds and believe him. They are hypocrites because, they professed the truth, but when the truth came they saw it but did not align themselves to it (John 9:41). They are like the second son who said to his father “I go, sir,” but did not go.

There is nothing new under the sun. There are still two types of people, the genuine and the hypocrites and you will know them by their deeds. The genuine align themselves with the truth; the hypocrites align themselves with the crowds. **The genuine may stumble and fall, but when confronted with the truth they believe; the hypocrites may never stumble and fall, but when confronted with the truth they refuse to believe.** The genuine will align themselves with Christ and his disciples, no matter how small the church, no matter what the world will say about them. The hypocrites will align themselves with a big church with lots of people and prestige, “because they love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God” (John 12:43).

We are righteous people because of our faith in Jesus Christ. But faith does not simply profess the truth, it takes sides and aligns itself with the truth. I would never endorse Donald Trump from the pulpit and I’m not, but one thing that is honest about what he’s done to the political climate in the states is that he makes you take a side, and that’s why all the career politicians hate him…those hypocrites who make a living out of carefully avoiding saying anything that might upset the crowds and the apple cart. The truth will upset the apple cart. When that happens will you align with the apple cart, or with the truth?

The importance of aligning oneself with the truth. The truth is whatever comes with authority from God and the capital “T” Truth is a person. He is the man Jesus Christ. John the Baptist bore witness about him and was beheaded. The apostles bore witness and died as martyrs. They didn’t simply say they believed in him; they aligned with that belief publically even to the point of death. And you are called to bear witness to Christ and align with the truth. And this is the truth from the Truth himself: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21).