

7. Man in the dock: Do you really think God is blind?

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Date: 16 September 2007

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[0 : 00] Well, do turn with me, if you would, to the passage that we read there in Luke's Gospel, chapter 11, page 870 in our Visitor's Bibles.

And our question this morning in the series that we've been undertaking in these mornings, in the questions that God asks men and women, where man is in the dock, not God, as we often suppose he is, our question this morning is the one that's implied in verse 40 of Luke chapter 11, where Jesus says, You fools, did not he who made the outside make the inside also?

In other words, do you really think God can't see through you? Do you really think God is blind? That's the question that Jesus is asking.

Now, that's a very relevant question for our society today, and I'll tell you why. Think of this paradox. We live in a society, don't we, that despises hypocrisy.

We hate hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is perhaps the only sin that there's left, that everybody looks down on. So, for example, politicians who say one thing, and then they're caught doing another thing, well, they'll be hounded, won't they, by the tabloid newspapers.

[1 : 32] Hounded right to the death. So you remember the one-time housing minister, who was railing against second home ownership. And, of course, it's discovered, like all true socialists, he had about three country piles in the Cotswolds.

And the papers were hounding him. And rightly so, you might say. Or then there's Perled Two Jags Prescott, remember? The great environmentalist.

Well, didn't sit quite so well, did it, with driving around Two Jags, belching out their fumes. And we despise hypocrisy. And yet, at the same time, here's the paradox, it's never been more true that we're a society obsessed with style at the expense of substance, with appearance at the expense of reality.

Isn't that right? Where outward show trumps inward truth and reality all the time. And we've created a world where we can convince ourselves that it seems if we talk enough about success, then we'll have success.

We see that in politics all the time, don't we? From the spin doctors. We see it in education, too. We tell ourselves we're getting better and better and brighter and brighter until we believe that we are.

[2 : 51] We've certainly all got more qualifications than we ever had before. And we like to believe that must mean that we're all much clever and much more knowledgeable than we were before. We see it in economics, too, don't we?

Where we can convince ourselves that economic growth just goes on and on and on and that the stock market and house prices only go one way, and that's up, defying reality. And we consume our way to growth.

That's what we've been doing in the West. We're borrowing and borrowing to spend and spend. And then when the crunch comes, as well, it does seem to be beginning to come, doesn't it?

Well, we tell ourselves not to worry. It must just be a good buying opportunity. We tell ourselves that the real economy, whatever that is, is in good shape. Somebody recently in the papers called it hedonomics.

It's where the good news, the news is always good. So if share prices go up, well, that's good news, obviously. If share prices go down, well, they're extremely good value. So that's very good news, too. Always good news.

[3 : 50] We like to have our cake and eat it, don't we, all the time. We don't like any nasty realities ever to bite. So on the one hand, we hate hypocrisy.

We hate falsity and inconsistency. And yet, we live so often collectively fooling ourselves all the time.

And actually, we're even fooling ourselves, too, aren't we, about our dislike for hypocrisy. Even that is hypocrisy, because we ourselves are acting the hypocrite. We're fooling ourselves.

We're fooling others all the time in so many ways. But here's the thing. We tend to think, don't we, that other people are the ones who get fooled.

And we often think that we ourselves can fool other people into thinking different things about us. We think that we can project an image of ourselves for others to see, the image that we want them to see.

[4 : 48] And yet, at the same time, we also tend to think that nobody else can ever pull the wool over our eyes, don't we? We can't be fooled ourselves. If you think about it, that's so often how we think.

We think that other people can't see through us, but somehow we can very easily see through other people. And because we think like that, we also tend to think that God can't see through us either.

And we think that we can very easily fool God. We like to think that, well, like the hypocrites on the Greek stage, the actors, that's where that word comes from, we wear masks.

And we can wear masks to keep God's gaze out of our innermost lives, so that we can fool God into leaving us alone. Fool God even into thinking that we're doing very well, and God ought to be very happy with us, and indeed we deserve God's praise.

Now that's true today, of you and me. But it was also true in Jesus' day. You see, Jesus is the great whistleblower. He's the great exposé.

[5 : 58] He will not let us get away with that fantasy thinking. Now Jesus calls a spade a spade. And he forces very uncomfortable confrontations with all of our God-avoidance mechanisms.

And we all have them. Because with Jesus, you see, there is absolutely no sham, there is no hypocrisy, there is no hiding. There's no hiding of us beneath masks. He can see.

And he puts us on the spot. I remember some years ago, I think it must have been, when was it, 1991 that Billy Graham last visited this country? I think it was. I remember seeing him on the television program Wogan.

I wonder if anybody ever saw that. One of the most fascinating things I've ever seen. Billy Graham being interviewed by Terry Wogan. And Terry Wogan kept trying to flatter him. He kept trying to turn the conversation to other things.

But if you saw that program, you'll see that Billy Graham kept putting the spotlight right back on Terry Wogan. He kept saying, what about you, Terry? Have you dealt with Jesus Christ personally?

[7 : 02] Primetime television, the nation watching. It didn't matter what Wogan said. He got very embarrassed. He turned it to something else. What about you, Terry? Have you dealt with Jesus Christ personally? He was direct.

Absolutely no sham. Just like Jesus in verse 40, our verse, in the face of a great deal of very impressive looking religion, very impressive religious show from all of these people.

And Jesus says, you fools. Didn't he who made the outside make the inside also? Do you really think God's blind? Do you think you can fool God?

Are you people crazy? See? That's what Jesus is saying. And that's the question that Jesus asks us, and with good reason. Because we are always masking ourselves from God.

We're always, whether we know it or not, acting the hypocrite. But no, Jesus says, you don't. You can't fool God. And you better realize that. And that's why in this chapter of Luke, Luke 11, Jesus exposes two different strategies.

[8 : 06] Two strategies that people employ as self-protection from the real God. They're very different. In fact, in many ways, they're opposite. But they're both a self-delusion.

They're both hypocrisy and sham. And the reality is, we don't fool anybody. God can see it a mile off. So we better take it seriously.

And by the way, let's notice, this is not for others. It's for us. Did you notice in chapter 12, verse 1, he began to say to his disciples first, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

You see, Jesus' followers need to be very, very aware of this. Because Jesus says it's an infection. And it spreads. And once it's taken root, it's very, very hard to get rid of.

That's the nature of leaven, of yeast. If anybody's ever had athlete's foot, you know just how hard it is to get rid of it. Well, that's a yeast infection. Beware, says Jesus, of the infection of hypocrisy.

[9 : 16] So he exposes the masks of hypocrisy. First of all, Jesus exposes the lies that will only ever deceive us.

And there are two different masks. The first is there in verse 27. It's the mask, I'm going to call it, of sentimental spirituality. As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, blessed is the woman that bore you and the breasts at which you are nursed.

Sentimental spirituality. It's very contemporary in our culture, isn't it? It's an effusive reaction. Blessed be your mother, says this woman to Jesus.

Here's a spirituality that loves effusive shows of emotion and devotion that's very dramatic, that's very impressive. And there are many, many forms of that in our world, aren't there?

There's all kinds of lit religious expressions like that. All kinds of religions. Think about the eastern religions. Think of the Hindu fakirs. Think of the holy men and all the things that they do rolling around in the dust, pricking themselves with nails.

[10 : 26] Think of the veneration of the shrines and the statues that you see in that part of the world. Of course, there's a Christianized version of exactly the same thing, isn't there? There are people who love the sensuous, love the great cathedrals, the choirs, the wistful music, the spiritual feeling that that engenders, the numinous.

There's a very particular form, isn't there, in the Catholic spirituality. Not so different, really, from the Hindu one. Weeping statues and saints and appearances of the Virgin Mary.

That's verse 27, isn't it? Blessed be your mother, Jesus. But we see it in other things in our culture, in New Age things, sensual meditation, yoga, crystals, talks of inner cleansing, all that sort of thing.

Effusive, sentimental spiritualities. See it in folk religion, too, don't we? Ours is the age of flowers appearing everywhere at the side of the road or at shrines.

Remember the death of Princess Diana and just the other day, the anniversary of it. Flowers everywhere. The shares are all going down. Buy shares in florists. They seem to be doing very well today.

[11 : 39] We live amid a rising tide, don't we, of sentimental spirituality. It's our religion of the age, I think, in the 21st century West.

But you see, all of that, all of it is marked by spirituality without morality. It's all about feelings without necessarily doings.

You feel spiritual. We are spiritual beings, we say. We want to express our spirituality. Have you noticed how people use that word very often in a similar way to the say, we must express our sexuality.

Express our spirituality. And so we have all sorts of stars, the Hollywood stars and so on, embracing all these spiritualities. You've got Scientology, haven't you?

That's a very key one today. Tom Cruise and all that. Or you've got mystical cults like the Kabbalah that Madonna is such a great fan of.

[12 : 37] All kinds of things. Any amount of pious effusions of spirituality, but, no conception amongst that of the demands that God makes on us.

But notice, you see, in verse 28, how Jesus is so unimpressed by these things. Look at verse 28. Let me give you the original Greek. Never mind the pious claptrap. What matters is your personal conduct.

Okay, I'm only joking, but that's really what he's saying, isn't it? No good, says Jesus, having all that effusive spirituality.

It's hearing the word of God and it's obeying the word of God. That's what matters. Jesus is always saying that, isn't he? Not Lord, Lord, it's doing the will of the Father in heaven.

That's what counts. It's no good having texts on your walls and your calendars or crosses on your walls and singing the songs or whatever it is unless you hear and do what God says.

[13 : 39] It's loving God that counts. If you love God, you obey his voice, says the Bible. Now, it wasn't just this poor woman who was like that. Many, many people were like that.

Look at verse 29. Crowds were all the same. They were increasing. He began to say, this whole generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign.

But no sign will be given it. They wanted signs and wonders. They wanted spectacular spirituality. All sorts of great displays. But Jesus says, that is the very antithesis of real faith.

Because real faith means real trust in God. And that means giving everything to Jesus. Surrendering everything into total dependence on him. Blessed, rather, are those who hear the word of God and do it, says Jesus.

But you see, sentimental spirituality doesn't want that. Won't have that. Wants to have all the outward show without any surrender of sovereignty or autonomy.

[14 : 45] Like the Eurosceptics, isn't it? That's what they're all saying. No surrender of our autonomy, our sovereignty. You see, according to Jesus, you can't have God's blessing without surrender of sovereignty.

It's impossible. That's why it says in verse 29, no sign will be given except the sign of Jonah. What was the sign of Jonah? Well, it was the sign of a resurrected preacher, wasn't it?

After three days in the belly of the fish, preaching a message of repentance and salvation from the judgment to come. Forget sentimentalism, says Jesus.

Forget self-fooling. Take off the mask that you're hiding behind and obey God's word. Obey his truth. That's his message. See, what the sentimentalist has to realize is that Jesus really does speak as God.

That is, he has authority. He's transcendent. We're very anti-authority today, aren't we? Authoritarian is a bad word, isn't it? It connotes all sorts of bad things.

[15 : 50] But Jesus says, I'm sorry, that's just too bad because God has authority. And flattery and effusive sentimental displays of religion isn't any good, says Jesus.

You might fool yourself, but you don't fool God. He sees the inside. He sees behind the mask. I wonder if that speaks to any of us today in particular.

Can't you see you might think that you're free? You might think that you're keeping the demands of God at bay in your life, but you're not free. You're not free to have a real relationship with God himself and Jesus Christ.

Because all true relationships make demands, don't they? And they demand commitment. And the mask of that kind of sentimental spirituality, it keeps those demands at bay and therefore it keeps Jesus at bay.

well, that's the first lie that deceives us, the mask of sentimental spirituality. But there's a second, a very different kind of mask that people also hide behind.

[17 : 00] It's very different, but it has the same effect. The mask of self-justifying morality or sanctimonious morality. Much more traditional religion, if you like.

See, the Pharisees were very religious, but actually, actually, Jesus says, they kept God at bay by their very moralism. Theirs wasn't a spirituality without morality, rather, theirs was a mask of super morality.

But actually, it was just a cloak of conceit, of self-satisfaction. And that's just as effective, just as effective at killing any real relationship with God, isn't it?

So, outwardly, here we had very religious people, very, very moral people. So much so, they invested in all kinds of extra ways of showing it. I mean, look at verse 42. You see, the Bible commanded tithing, giving a tenth of your substance to the Lord.

It was a mark of thanksgiving you gave to God. It was a mark of trust. You gave him the first fruits, trusting that he would bring in the rest of the harvest. But, they went to extremes, tithing their mint and their herbs.

[18 : 11] You just imagine the scene in the garden. You're out there picking your herbs. You know, one for God, nine for me. One for God, nine for me. It's preposterous, isn't it? That's what they did. See how religious, see how moral we are.

I don't know what happened. Did they bring it all to church? Put it in the offering bag? It'd be very peculiar, wouldn't it? A few ten pound notes and some coins and a bunch of parsley. What did the priests thought?

What did they do with all these herbs that were brought with the tithe? Great, just what we need. Maybe we can do Jamie Oliver's lamb and rosemary and garlic for our Passover celebration this year. I mean, it's absurd, isn't it?

Tithing their herbs. But it's serious, really, isn't it? It's not a joke. Because here are people who are surrounding themselves with morality and with religion.

And in fact, they're very sanctimonious in the extreme. They're very, very quick, aren't they, these people, to find fault with others in the most trivial of ways. He doesn't wash his hands before he eats. And he doesn't wear a tie for communion.

[19 : 13] And she came to church in shorts, do you know? That's the sort of thing. And yet, in reality, Jesus says, they're blind.

Blind to the fact that they themselves are miles and miles and miles away from the real heart love that God desires, that God demands. See, the moralist doesn't have a problem with authority in the abstract sense.

He's not like the sentimentalist. He can cope with the idea that God is transcendent, but what he can't cope with is the idea that this God really gets up close and personal. That God is near, that he's drawn near personally in Jesus Christ.

And that Jesus Christ really does speak with all the authority of the transcendent God. And therefore, the true morality and the way to really please God is to listen to Jesus and to love the Lord Jesus.

See, the Pharisees were fooling themselves just as much as the rest of them were. That kind of moralism, that kind of religiosity, no matter how apparently orthodox it is, it's just like the mask of sentimentalist spirituality.

[20 : 30] It keeps the real God, the living God, made known in Jesus Christ, keeps him out of your life. See, the one wants an experience of God without any of the authority of God.

The other wants the authority that doesn't have any real personal experience, no real living knowledge of the living God in their life. And both of these things are things that deceive us.

Both of these things are masks that keep the real God out of our lives in any real sense. Now, that moralist, the very religious person might well fool other people.

They fool themselves about their sham godliness. They think they fool others, although actually, often others will see through them, won't they? Remember Mrs. Jellaby from Bleak House?

If you've read the book or seen the TV. Remember, she was the one who was so consumed with the natives of Buribulagar, and yet her own family, her own kith and kin, were utterly neglected.

[21 : 34] And Dickens says, Mrs. Jellaby's eyes had a curious habit of looking a long way off, as though they could see nothing nearer than Africa. Well, there's people like that, isn't there?

That's the way of sanctimonious moralism. Now, if you're not a Christian, you might think that that's what Christianity is all about, because you've met people like that. But you need to see that absolutely nothing can be further from the truth.

Jesus is equally devastating in his condemnation of those kinds of people. In fact, perhaps he's more so than he is of the kind of nebulous sentimentalism.

You've noticed, I'm sure, when we read through it, how often he says those dreadful words, woe to you, woe to you, exposes their reality, you see, in verse 43, doesn't he?

They're not really loving God, they're loving themselves. They want all the good seats, they want the greetings, they want the recognition. You see, just like the others, they're avoiding the real demands of a real God, who wants a real relationship with them, one of love and of obedience.

[22 : 45] Because you see, the demands of the real God are far, far greater, aren't they? You see, verse 42, they've neglected to love justice and to love God, but that's what God wants. And that's open-ended, isn't it?

To love God and to love justice. There's no limits to that, it's a positive command, that's why it's so scary, isn't it? It's much easier to limit God's demands, much easier to limit it to a whole bunch of rules so that we know that we can safely keep them and pass the exam.

That's what exams are all about, isn't it? Nobody wants to know things for the sake of knowing them, they say, just teach us what's in the exam, is it in the exam? What we all used to say, is it in the exam? If it's not, forget it.

It's what we instinctively want, isn't it? We just want to be told what to do. Because, you see, that puts us in the driving seat. It makes us feel that God must bless me, because look, I've done all these things.

But, you see, that's just another mask, just another protective barrier to keep out the real God in all his real demands. A self-justifying morality keeps the real God out of your life just as effectively as sentimental spirituality with no substance.

[24 : 03] And Jesus says that is a real danger for disciples. Look at chapter 12, verse 1 again. Beware the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

He says that first to his disciples. He says, you fall into that trap all the time. But God isn't blind. He sees it all.

And we're rumbled. So what's the answer? Well, Jesus turns us from these lies that can only deceive us to the light that alone can deliver us.

He says, don't try to hide from the light of God in Jesus Christ. That's the only way to disaster. Masking out the true light. Keeping the real Jesus at bay.

That's what hypocrisy is. Whatever its form, it's avoiding the true light of the true Lord Jesus Christ. Because Jesus Christ is where you meet God's full authority.

[25 : 06] And Jesus Christ is where you meet God truly, personally, up close, invading your life. The verses 33 to 36 are all about that.

It's what people are doing in these different ways. One way is the way of verse 33. Shutting out the light altogether. Down in a cellar, in a bowl, hiding the lamp so no one can see it.

That's the way of amoral spirituality, of sentimental spirituality. It hides it. It snuffs out the challenge of the real Jesus just in an avalanche of sentimentalism and mumbo-jumbo.

It can be long on ritual. Blessed be the womb that bore you. But absolutely no voice of God is ever heard and ever heeded. That's the way of many in our society today, isn't it?

Who want spirituality but who don't want the authority of the living God. They don't want the demands of Jesus who is Lord. So they hide that light completely, won't listen to it, black it out.

[26 : 10] But another way is the way of verses 34 and 35, the way of closing your eyes to the real truth by taming it, by domesticating it. Jesus says, your eye is a lamp of your body.

When your eye is healthy, your body is full of light. But when it's bad, it's full of darkness. Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. So you turn the light of God, his law, his commands, into darkness, into barren moralism.

We think it's good, but Jesus says, really, it's just dead. Because it's got no real knowledge of a living saviour. And that's the way of so much dead religiosity, isn't it?

So sanctimonious, so deadly. And it's there in the churches. And it's there in our hearts. You see, either one of these things keeps out just as effectively the real light of life.

Because it keeps out the real Jesus. It allows us to fool ourselves, maybe. Fool others, well perhaps, but not God. Do you really think God is blind?

[27 : 18] You're fools if you do, says Jesus. Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? God's not blind. And none of us can hide from his penetrating gaze.

And that means, friends, whether we claim to follow Jesus or not, Jesus says we all need to beware of the poisonous leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy, self-deception.

leaven, yeast, grows so easily, doesn't it, in the dark. Kept in the darkness, it'll flourish, it'll spread, you can't eradicate it.

Just as our propensity to hypocrisy will. But light, light has a great inhibiting effect on the leaven of self-deception.

If that is, it is the light of Jesus Christ, the true gospel, not a barren moralism with no personal encounter with Jesus our Savior, nor a sentimental spirituality that won't recognize his authority, that won't recognize his lordship.

[28 : 21] But the real Jesus, the risen and the victorious Son of Man, who like Jonah in his day, lives to call men and women to true repentance that we might be saved from the judgment to come.

So the only answer, the only answer is to let the true light of Jesus in, isn't it? Don't keep it at bay in your life. Stop your avoidance tactics, whatever they are.

Take off your masks, says Jesus. Only then, says verse 36, will your whole body be full of light, inside and outside. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when the lamp with its rays gives you light.

There will be no more darkness anymore. Because the true gospel of the true Jesus is searching you. And then, as Jesus says in verse 41, we will truly be able to give out, give to God and to give to others from within, from hearts that really are cleansed by his grace.

Do you really think God is blind? That he can't see in and know the real truth about the state of your heart and mind before him? God isn't blind.

[29 : 41] But alas, we often are, aren't we? That's why we need to let the light of Jesus search us and try us. That's why we need to let that light in and go on letting it in, day after day, week after week, listening to his word.

Letting his word be the light that fills our lives with transparency, with reality, with light. That's the only way to avoid being a fool before God.

It's the only way for us to be rescued from hypocrisy. Verse 28, Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and do it.

Then, verse 36, your whole body will be full of light, having no part dark. It will be wholly bright as when the lamp with its rays gives you light.

Do you really think God is blind? No. Let the light of the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ lighten your heart inside and out in every part.

[30 : 54] That's the only way. But why would any of us want to live any other way? Why would we want to live in the dark when in Jesus Christ he's given us the light of life?

Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, indeed as the psalmist said, you have searched us and known us and your light penetrates to our innermost parts.

Expose us, we pray, but expose us that we might be warmed and lighted by your light and drawn into your light and leave behind and go on leaving behind all that is false.

That we might truly know you, our living God, and gladly bow to your authority in our lives. That we might be and go on being clean in your sight.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.